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SAMENA TRENDS

EXCLUSIVELY FOR SAMENA TELECOMMUNICATIONS COUNCIL'S MEMBERS

BUILDING DIGITAL ECONOMIES

A SAMENA Telecommunications Council Newsletter

AMMAR AKER
CEO
PALTEL GROUP

Interviews

Viable Strategies for **Innovation in Telecom Industry**

Data Dynamics:
Innovative monetization opportunities

CMO SUMMIT 2014

Discussion Topics

- **Revenue Stream Expansion:** Seeking new business opportunities across industries
- **Cloud computing, data privacy, big data, M2M:** marketability and revenue diversification.

11th October, 2014
The Palace Downtown, Dubai

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6:00 – 7:30 pm
Dinner & Discussion
7:30 – 10:30 pm

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Contact us:

info@samenacouncil.org - www.samenacouncil.org
#304, Alfa Building, Knowledge Village, P.O. Box: 502544, Dubai, UAE.
Tel: 971.4.3642700 I Fax: 971.4.3697513

Join us

SAMENA TRENDS

Editor-in-Chief
Bocar A. BA

Contributing Editors
Zakir Syed
Awais Amjad
Javaid Akhtar Malik

Contributing Member
Bravo

Publisher
SAMENA Telecommunications Council

Subscriptions
subscriptions@samenacouncil.org

Advertising
ads@samenacouncil.org

Legal Issues or Concerns
legal@samenacouncil.org

SAMENA TRENDS
#304, Alfa Building, Knowledge Village
PO Box: 502544, Dubai, United Arab Emirates
Tel: +971.4.364.2700

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Viable Strategies for Innovation in Telecom Industry

SAMENA region, specifically UAE has an immense potential of market growth if innovative platforms are introduced well according to the market needs. UAE is driven by a new shopping culture and the ever increasing number of mobile and internet subscribers, the MENA region is becoming one of the fastest growing commerce markets in the world while UAE has been ranked first among the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries in terms of performance in the 2014 Global Innovation Index, according to a report published by Cornell University, INSEAD and the World Intellectual Property Organization.

It's impartially noticeable that MENA has bright prospects concerning the advancement of the commerce landscape, especially for telecom companies which are natively connected to the mobile and the users' digital experience. The SAMENA region with large national and international Telco groups with 25 countries, competition is not easy in such dynamics. In telecoms, staying ahead of the industry inclinations is vital. The dynamicity of the market and its regulations require responsive tactics and strategies for the improvement of mobile packages, roaming offers, customer service, user engagement and data management.

Users and businesses have become more aware and demanding than ever before. Consumers' expectations are increasing with the passage of time; they assume their applications and services to be accessible ubiquitously. Meanwhile, as market verticals become progressively digitized, businesses are showing a great need for wide variety of new services such as m-payment platforms, content and streaming services, cloud computing among others. On the other hand operators are coping to satisfy the needs of such knowledgeable end-users, with heavy CAPEX to improvise on the network capability and connectivity, which creates a bottleneck on their cash flows and profits.

Moreover, new rivalry has appeared to satisfy and often shape end-user demands – plentiful of it from the companies outside the usual operator ecosystem. These competitors are demonstrating to be very popular as exposed by many OTT (Over-The-Top) players. Consequently, the telecom ecosystem has become much more challenging while the incorporated value chain on which operators had the reliance including the proprietary networks, critical applications and services, billing platforms, and even the billing relationship with consumers is quickly moving out of their control.

In order to stay ahead of competition, operators will have to focus on innovative platforms, for example, shifting the shopping experience to the online environment, by developing a commerce platform gives telecom operators the perfect tool to acquire a big part of that tech-savvy population. In order to grow their business, telecom companies need to have a better customer engagement strategy and develop a better understanding on customer behaviors.

Yours truly,

Bocar A. BA
Chief Executive Officer
SAMENA Telecommunications Council

Ammar Aker
CEO
Paltel Group

Paltel is the second largest employer in Palestine (after the Government)

Mr. Aker is currently the Chairman of the Board of Directors of VTEL Middle East and Africa (MEA)

Ammar Aker is the Palestine Telecom Group CEO and a member of Paltel Group's Board of Directors. Notably, Paltel is the second largest employer in Palestine (after the Government).

Prior to assuming his current position as Group CEO, he was the CEO of the Palestine Cellular Communications Co. Ltd., Jawwal, the first private leading cellular operator in Palestine.

Mr. Aker is currently the Chairman of the Board of Directors of VTEL Middle East and Africa (MEA). He is a member of the Board of the Palestine Development and Investment Company (PADICO Holding), the largest investment holding company in the country. He is also the Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors for the Jericho Gate Investment, a project of PADICO Holding.

As the CEO of Jawwal, Mr. Aker led Jawwal"s efforts in not only maintaining the largest market share, but also inspired the company in creating a unique customer experience for millions of customers. This was done in spite of numerous operational challenges by illegal Israeli operators in the Palestinian market. Prior to Jawwal, Mr. Aker has also held various finance and accounting positions in the U.S., Canada, UAE and Palestine.

Mr. Aker has enthusiastically promoted best practice in management and corporate governance throughout his career and has pushed for excellence in management, helping to inspire peers to aim higher in their career and professional goals. During his tenure, four Paltel Group female employees were ranked among the top 50 women executives in telecom and the Group were ranked among the top 20 telecom operators in the MENA region.

Mr. Aker is an active Board member in a number of international, regional and local initiatives such as; Palestine for a New Beginning (PNB); The Palestine International Award for Excellence and Creativity; in addition to the Amideast Advisory Board in Palestine. He is also an active member of the Young Presidents' Organization (YPO) Palestine Branch and the Palestinian Businessmen Association (PBA).

Mr. Aker holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Accounting from Edinboro University of Pennsylvania and an MSc degree in Accounting from Kent State University, Ohio.

Q. What are the key drivers of your organization's regional growth?

A. As we are an integrated telecom group of companies, allow me to tell you the aspects of growth in our fixed line operation first. In the fixed line services, we have worked in partnership with Turk Telecom by investing in a submarine cable to target regional markets with wholesale services and to partner with regional players in order to offer international connectivity services. Locally, we are working to increase broadband penetration; Offer content over broadband to increase the average of offered speeds and introduce new products for the corporate segment that meet the segments increasing needs.

As far as the mobile operation is concerned, Palestine has a young population, where 40% of the population is below 14 years old, which means continuous growth in subscribers for the future. However, data revenue is still at below par levels for the region due to the lack of 3G mobile broadband services. When 3G services are eventually launched, data revenue will be affected positively. We see content and mobile apps in the region and Palestine as also drivers to our growth in the mobile operation.

Additionally, we do have an existing and stable regional investment by Paltel Group in an offshore telecom operator, VTEL. That remains our main investment outside of Palestine.

Q. As the company CEO, How do you respond to the growth challenges?

A. At our companies, we formulate specific dedicated teams from different departments or locations to be a part of specific growth initiatives. We create scenarios, see where bottlenecks are predicted, try to open new avenues and opportunities and we also try to upgrade and innovate existing services and achieve more customer care and more value added products. We do this by paying attention to core business and core infrastructure. A lot of focus goes into investment in our network infrastructure to enhance the quality of offered services and to introduce new services throughout the Group.

Q. How do you intend to retain your competitive edge?

A. We will have to remain on edge and on strategy. This will be carried out by keeping our core value proposition to customers, our innovative approach to overcoming challenges and trying not to be distracted by external elements of war and politics. On a technical basis, we will be leveraging emerging technologies such as OTT and offering a variety of services which are implemented with high quality, wide coverage and affordable prices. It is also important for us to continue in preserving and promoting the way we do business internally-between departments, sections and individuals and externally-between our customers, vendors, competitors and regulatory authorities. The evolution of OTT technologies and copper acceleration techniques is making the offering of triple play more and more feasible, while OTT is sharply cannibalizing voice, which is still the major revenue stream for most operators.

Q. How do you see the opportunities resulting from the recent evolvement of the telecom market? And how can you as operator benefit from?

A. On this point, I want to be fully transparent and honest, the Palestinian Telecom Industry in terms of the mobile business has not benefited fully from the recent telecom evolvement due to several Israeli limitations. Our main obstacle remains external, which is the refusal by Israel to grant Palestinian operators the necessary 3G/4G frequencies. Other operational impediments are; the inability to import equipment at will and; the imposition of geographical discontinuity on the ground that has resulted in higher service costs. In addition to that, Palestinian mobile operators are facing illegal and unbalanced competition from several Israeli operators.

Q. Have there been any limitations or vulnerable areas that have slowed the spread of mobile phone usage or wireless network implementation?

A. I must say that in addition to the limitations imposed by Israel, the unstable political and economic situation inside Palestine and its surrounding neighbors has negatively affected the mobile phone industry on several levels. Unemployment remains high and there is pressure on the consumer purchasing power. However, the need to communicate and remain connected among the population due to these unfortunate abnormalities also remain high.

Q. It's always a challenge to satisfy the customers, what steps have you taken to improve the quality of service and what impact has it made in the market?

A. We have taken several steps in the mobile operator to improve customer satisfaction, such as the continuous investment in systems and networks to promote coverage and quality. We also invest in non-profitable locations because we are committed to enable each and every customer to benefit from our services.

There is also development in all the areas of customer touch points which include call centers, showrooms, dealers and social media in addition to E-self-care tools that enable customers to receive our services in the most practical and convenient ways. We also provide micro segmented offers and promotions to targeted subscribers in order to exceed the needs and expectations of our customers in addition to implementing an extensive range of "street buzz events" and PR activities to reflect our customer's needs.

In the fixed line business, we are always working to increase broadband speeds through shortening of the local loop; increasing the reach of fiber to customers; improving complaints and faults handling time; Enhancing customer self-care channels and offering variety of services that satisfy our customer needs.

Q. What proportion of you company's revenues is contributed by non-voice services and what steps are being taken to increase this share in next couple of years?

A. If we have a look at the mobile operator data, the average distribution of revenue is as follows: Voice is at 86%; Non voice of SMS, data and other services is at 10% and others are at 4%. Unfortunately, without 3G, it's very hard to increase the share of non voice services, especially the data part.

However in the fixed line operator we see a flip side of the picture above. About 54% of Paltel revenue comes from non-voice services and this percentage will be increased in the coming future by: Increased broadband penetration; ongoing shortening of the loop projects to enhance broadband speeds and increase ARPU; offering content services over broadband; increasing the penetration of fiber optics; targeting business customers with cutting edge technology services and solutions and offering wholesales services via strategic partnerships with telecom operators in the region.

Q. What are your views on the current policy and regulatory environment in the region?

A. Despite the fact that the regulator in Palestine facilitates the issuance of licenses for the telecom companies, the regulator's policy to open and encourage competition in the Palestinian market has greatly affected Paltel's revenues. Also, we are perceived as the only fixed-line company in the Palestinian market which forces Paltel to provide all kinds of facilities for new competitors in the market in order to grow by offering services at the lowest possible prices. However, such new comers can always get the same services we offer from Israeli operators, a practice that is not fair and often regulators cannot stop it while it is illegal.

Regionally, the regulators try unfortunately to apply models that have worked well in the West without tuning them to fit the region's special circumstances and the rapidly changing market dynamics such as the quick erosion of voice by OTT voice applications.

Q. As you work in such a dynamic sector, how do you ensure your employees stay up to date with the latest technological advances?

A. We stay on our toes and vigilant, we have no choice. We cannot be static and we are challenged daily by crisis and emergencies. So we have to remain agile. We also provide appropriate budgets for employee training courses and remain in touch with the world trends via site visits, consultancies, conferences, workshops and relevant events. It goes without saying that we have subscriptions with major telecom data bases and research centers, such as SAMENA.

Q. What is your vision for the company over the next 5 years?

A. Our vision for the company is to remain the number one operator of choice in Palestine and to keep exceeding subscribers needs and expectations. We also want to continue to enrich the life of our subscribers with innovative communications and entertainment solutions that allow our customers to "live their life the way they want it."

Q. How do you tackle the enormous diversity between the stages of development in different cities and regions?

A. This is carried out by efficient segmentation and market research, such as identifying customer's behavior trends in different areas and their media consumption habits. We also use geo-segmentation where we optimize our investment and our offerings to fit the needs of different cities and potential and current customers.

Q. How can your company compete with bigger multinational competitors in the region?

A. We are not alone in this issue. Naturally it only makes sense to try to partner with the main OTT players, such as WhatsApp and Facebook to try to neutralize their negative effect on our industry and to emphasize cooperation with regional players to offer cross boarder services.

Q. Keeping in view Facebook's acquisition of WhatsApp, do you believe that the rising trend in new Startups and their acquisitions can affect telecom industry?

A. Yes definitely the impact is felt. However, we are trying to cope with this by offering our customers various partnership bundles for WhatsApp and Facebook in order to generate additional revenues to compensate the loss in the ordinary messaging area. Such OTT applications are creating major threats that quickly cannibalize voice revenue streams in the telecom industry.

Q. How difficult it is for the operators to align their innovation (products, VAS) strategy with the regulatory strategy?

A. Firstly, the regulator's strategy is to encourage competition and open the Palestinian market at the expense of Paltel Group, which compromises our position for the benefit of newer, less established competitors, while Paltel continuously seeks to innovate in order to compete for service cannibalization by OTT.

Secondly, Paltel Group companies always try to offer products that are adapted with the regulatory strategy and legislation, but some products are sometimes delayed for launch in the imminent future. However, the regulator works to collaborate with the telecom partners to finalize the needed legislations so as launch of our products can take place immediately. Again, our biggest challenge in introducing new products and VAS is the imposed Israeli restrictions and not the regulator policy.

Q. How do you create a culture of innovation in the company?

A. As I said before we remain focused, yet searching for the best ideas, solutions and empowering our own staff to come with innovative solutions. Our innovation culture is enriched in several ways, such as availing several sources of databases and research centers to our employees; Ensuring that employee innovation is rewarded; Implementing the creation of dedicated units in the company which are responsible for scanning and filtering ideas from the regional and global markets; Investing in the development skills of employees; Emphasizing technology as an enabler to the business and reward contribution; Risk taking and placing value on "out of the box" ideas provided by employees.

Q. Are you open to strategic partnerships? What are the prominent partnerships that you have had recently?

A. We value these strategic partnerships as we look for regional cooperation. I have mentioned our social media partnerships above, in addition to our strategic partnerships with Zain Jordan (One Network solution); Turk Telecom and VTel where we own a 25% stake.

Q. What role marketing strategy plays in overall expansion and acquisitions? What kind of revenue growth and market share are you looking at through your strategy?

A. We have invested and lead in the marketing realm and created a differentiator and solid brand presence and equity across our service lines. As such, our Marketing team is responsible for locating opportunities and acting on them. They are also responsible for identifying threats and neutralizing them. Our hard work has enabled us to surpass all regional benchmarks in mobile, in terms of subscribers and revenue market shares when legal competition started back in 2009. In the fixed line, we look for revenue growth in broadband and in fiber related services as well as in new managed services.

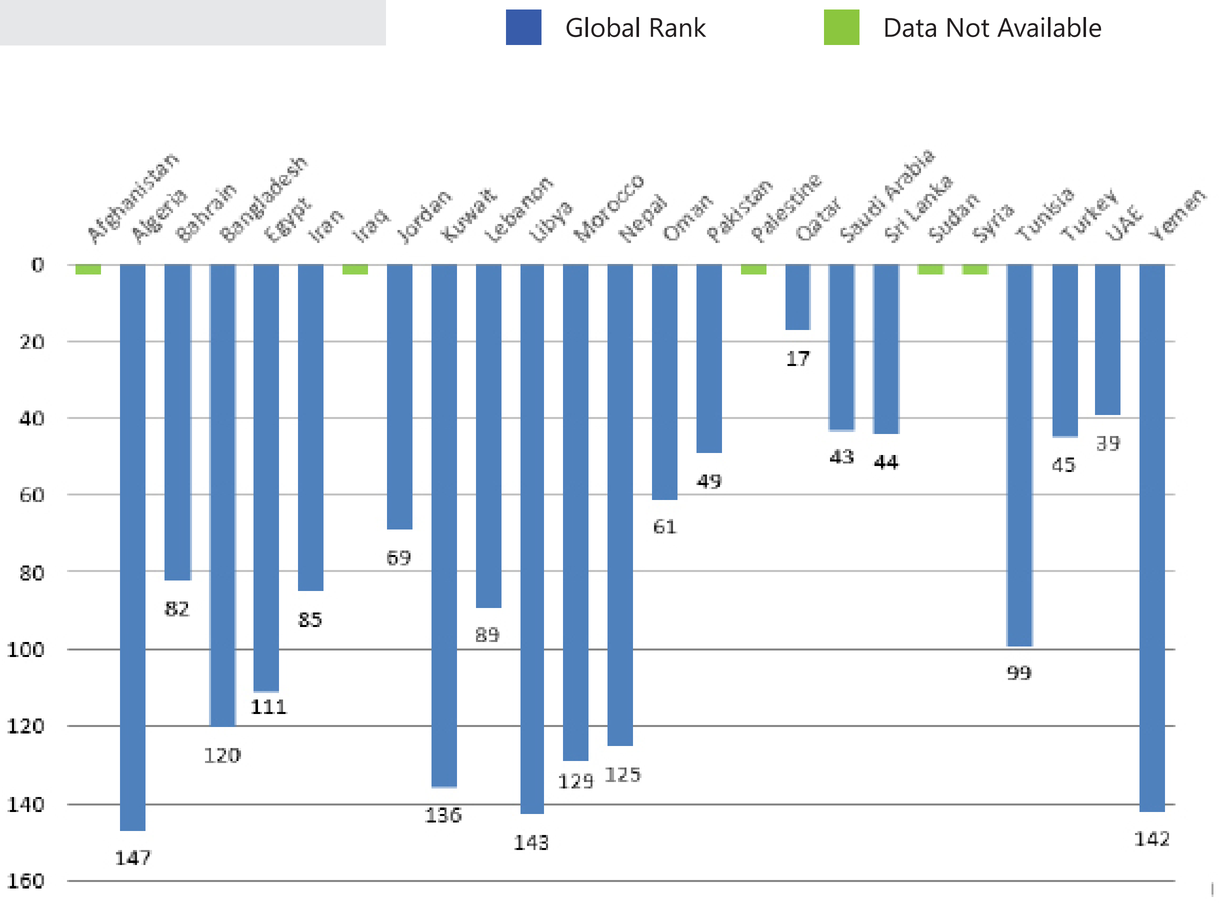
Q. Do you think there is further scope to decrease tariffs and still be viable in terms of profit?

A. I believe so, however, this is conditional on the ability to bundle different fixed and mobile services and our ability to introduce new services. It is becoming more challenging these days to lower prices and maintain a positive elasticity in the market.

Q. What are some of the key characteristics of your customers? What makes them stay, and what makes them leave?

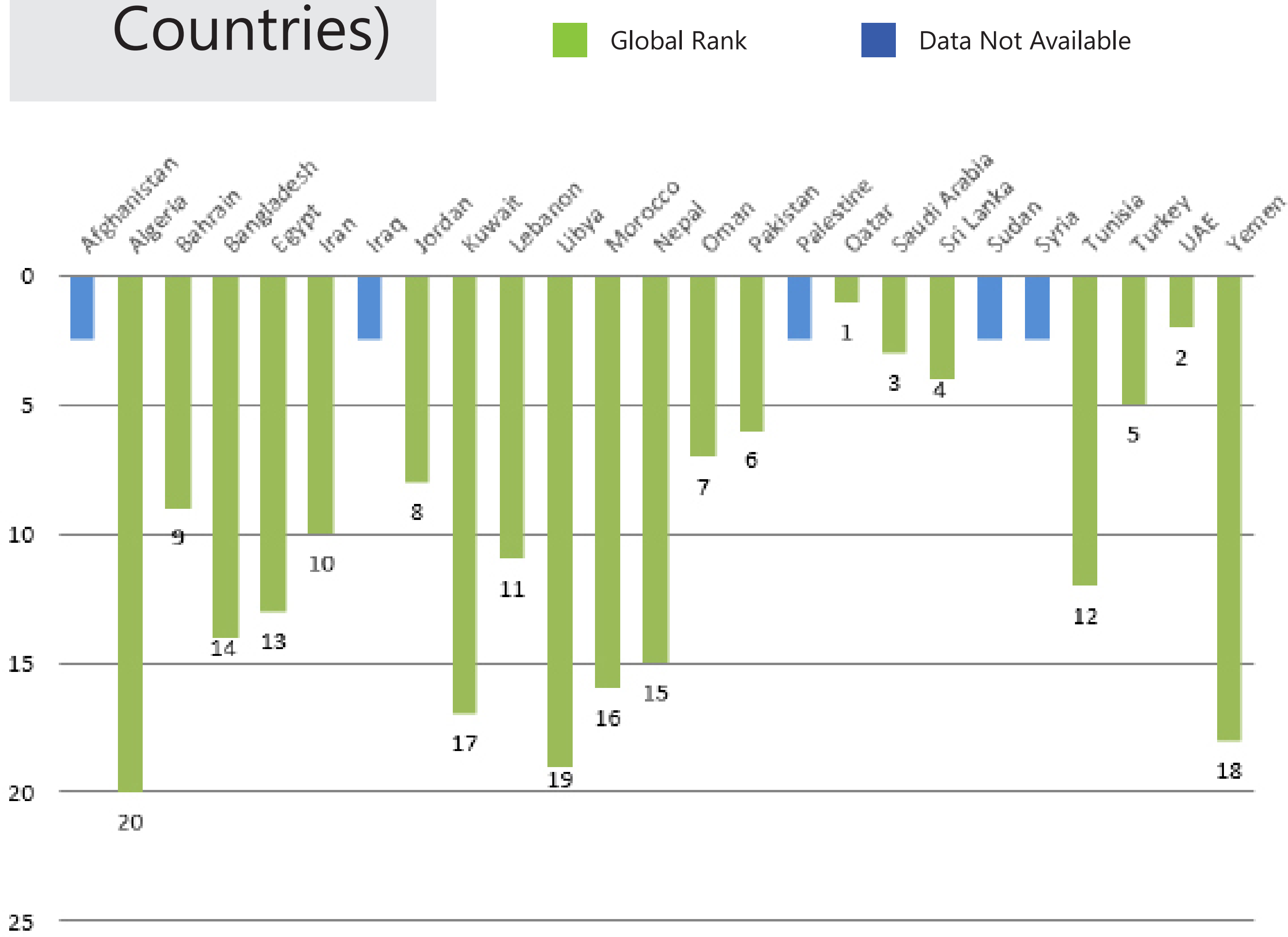
A. We have similar customer behaviors like other markets but with some unique features due to our particular situation. As you know, there are many different characteristics for different segments of customers, for example, there is the corporate segment that needs to always have the best treatment and services, and there is the youth segment which always needs to have the latest technology developments and gadgets. We have a large segment of price sensitive customers that keep moving between plans and offers which best utilize their needs. As I said earlier, our market is a bit complicated due to the fluctuating economic and political situation. Our customers are price sensitive and are always seeking to reduce prices, where we try to offer them different segments with affordable offers to fulfill their needs.

Capacity For Innovation (Global Rank of SAMENA Countries)



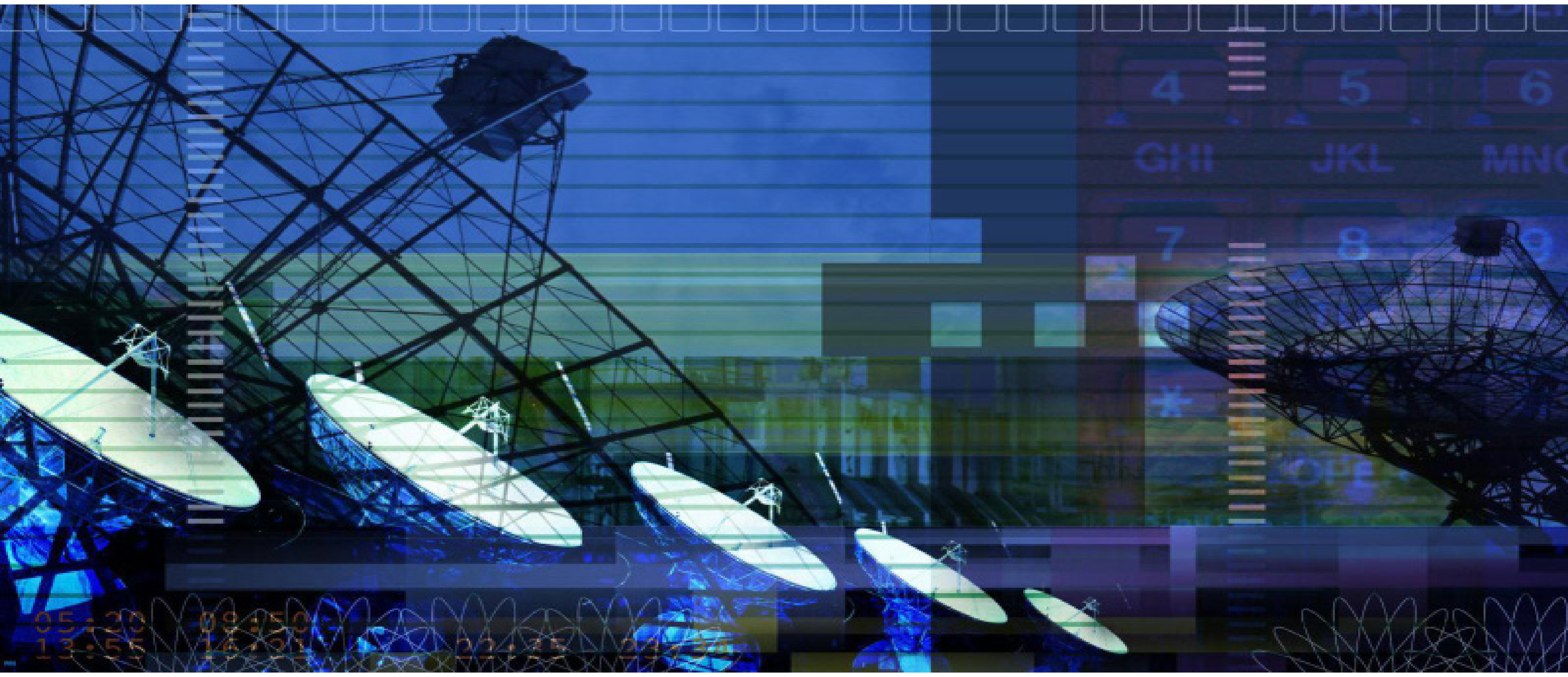
Total Countries: 148
Rank 1: Switzerland+
Data Source: World Economic Forum - Global Competitiveness Report 2013
Image Source: SAMENA Telecommunications Council

Capacity For Innovation (Regional Rank of SAMENA Countries)



Research Note: Ranking done by SAMENA Council's team based on data from The World Economic Forum. Within the SAMENA region, the Qatar appears to be on top in terms of "Capacity for Innovation" which means that in a given country, to what extent do companies have the capacity to innovate. The ranking is based on scores i.e. 1 = not at all; 7 = to a great extent. Within the SAMENA region, the top 3 countries where companies have the best capacity for innovation are from the Middle East. Among the top 5 positions, Sri Lanka is the only one from South Asia which is at number 4 within the region with companies having considerable capacity for innovation. It is interesting to note that there is not country from North Africa in the list to top10.

Total Countries: 25
Rank 1: Qatar
Data Source: World Economic Forum - Global Competitiveness Report 2013
Image Source: SAMENA Telecommunications Council



MEMBERS NEWS

MEMBERS UPDATES

Ooredoo adds new Hala services on mobile app

Ooredoo has announced the launch of a host of new features for Hala customers on the Ooredoo Mobile App, as the company aims to significantly improve their user experience for prepaid customers.

The new features have been designed to give users direct control over managing key Hala resources from their smartphones. With the new updates, Hala customers can now remotely subscribe and unsubscribe to various prepaid services on the mobile app, such as the 4G Key, Hala Smart Packs, Mobile Internet Packs, Ooredoo Passport and international services, such as International SMS Packs, International Calling Packs, International Saver Key, India Key, Bangladesh Key, and Philippines SMS Key.

The new app update has become available after strong prepaid customer demand, and aims to cater for the company's large customer base that use their mobile devices to maintain their services as an integral part of their smart lifestyles. Qualcomm LTE Broadcast SDK now available to developers.

Etisalat's mobile app crosses quarter million downloads

Etisalat revealed the latest figure of over quarter million users who have downloaded the company's new mobile app 'Etisalat UAE' in just over a month. Etisalat launched the interactive self-care app to offer customers a range of smart services on their fingertips – mobile account tracking, bill payments, instant subscription to packages and bundles, parking payment and much more.

The high number of downloads on both, smartphones and tablets, confirms the ever-growing demand of mobile content and services in the UAE. Khaled ElKhouly, Etisalat, said, "We launched the Etisalat UAE app as an essential and valuable channel of interaction with our customers who are increasingly using their mobile devices for routine services round the clock. Our new app broke the quarter million download barrier in just over a month which is an enormous achievement for us. The massive number of transactions such as purchase of new plans and services, as well as bill payments is another indication of the app's success."

New data from Etisalat also pointed out the popularity of the app's live chat feature, which is regularly used by travelers as well who enquire about Etisalat's roaming packs most suited to their voice calls or data requirements.

Omantel provides MPLS service to National Bank of Abu Dhabi -Oman

Omantel, the leading provider of integrated telecommunication services signed a five year agreement with National Bank of Abu Dhabi (NBAD) – Oman to provide MPLS service to link the bank branches located in different governorates which contributes to enhancing the services provided to NBAD Oman customers, as well as speeding up the process of communication between the branches through a highly secured network.

Commenting on the agreement Eng. Salah Al Balushi Manager of Financial Sector Sales, Omantel: "We are proud of the trust of NBAD Oman in selecting Omantel to provide the bank with our state-of-the-art MPLS service for one of its major projects which will enable the bank to obtain high speed services and increase efficiency throughout the different branches in the Sultanate." Omantel MPLS service will allow NBAD Oman to link 9 of its branches along with a number of ATM machines which will help the bank to provide a highly secured service to its customers."

Get freedom of choice with Etisalat's new mobile data plans and data boosters

The UAE's widest and most competitive choice of mobile data plans from Etisalat just got wider. Etisalat announced the addition of two more pocket-friendly mobile data plans for prepaid and post-paid customers – the 3GB, and 10GB plans, offering highly tailored options to meet its customers' daily data needs. The 20GB mobile data plan, already available for post-paid customers, will now be available for subscription in prepaid.

PTCL launches 'Managed WiFi Service

Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited (PTCL) has launched an exclusive WiFi service, 'Managed WiFi' for its corporate customers. PTCL's Managed WiFi service provides organizations with secure, reliable and fast wireless LAN access. This service is available across multiple locations without the hassle of associated hardware and maintenance costs.

The service also comes with efficient centralized management, advanced analytic tools, web based management portal and application inventory. PTCL Managed WiFi is the first of its kind service in Pakistan which caters to the growing connectivity needs of banking and financial sectors, hospitals and educational institutions, as well as large and small government and private organizations.

Batelco and Milestone in key tie-up

Batelco has been certified as a silver partner of Milestone, a provider of open platform Internet Protocol video management software.

Establishment of silver partnership with Milestone reflects Batelco's initiatives and plans to become a key provider of physical security and surveillance solutions. 'Batelco is striving to attain the highest level of certification from global industry players to further enhance customers' confidence in the company's products and services, and thus their experience too,' said Batelco enterprise division general manager Adel Daylami.

'This partnership translates the significant investment we have made in the most advanced technologies and our ongoing efforts to offer the best services to our customers.

'It will certainly further strengthen our position in the market since this level of certification can only be achieved through developing the skill sets to implement and support the solutions,' he said.

Ufone provides life jackets to Pakistan Navy for flood relief

To facilitate the residents of Sindh, Ufone extends its timely support in the form of life jackets which are being provided to Pakistan Navy at Navy Flood Camp, Sukkur for emergency response, as flood warning centers reported the onslaught of the deluge in a day, which is expected to cause major damages. The life jackets will help in rescue efforts whereby saving precious lives.

Ufone's services are not only limited to its customers, in fact to all Pakistanis, which are extended specially in the hour of need such as droughts, floods, earthquakes or other natural calamities. It is evident from the operator's past Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives specially the earthquake, 2010 flood relief efforts, 2014 Tharparkar drought and now the floods that have devastated Punjab and continue to wreak havoc throughout the rest of the country.

Nawras to rebrand to Ooredoo in Q4 2014

Nawras has announced that it will rebrand to Ooredoo by the end of this year to fully integrate into one of the fastest growing global telecommunication brands. Nawras customers will enjoy added benefits from being part of the global group, which successfully connects over 95 million customers across 15 countries in the Middle East, North Africa and South-East Asia.

H.E. Sheikh Abdullah Bin Mohammed Bin Saud Al Thani, Chairman Ooredoo Group, said, "This is an exciting moment for the entire Ooredoo family as we welcome one of our most innovative operators to the new brand. Communications in Oman has developed rapidly and will now enter a new chapter as we work together to deliver the best end-to-end service quality to our customers."

Greg Young, CEO of Nawras, said, "The transition to Ooredoo marks the next step in our evolution as a leading telecommunications provider. As we move into an increasingly digital world, the alignment with the global Group means we can share best practices from other markets while maintaining our strong customer focus. This next important step for us under Ooredoo's global vision will enrich the customer experience through stronger communication and advanced technologies."

Huawei releases Global Connectivity Index for Building a Better Connected World

At its annual Cloud Congress (HCC) held in China, Huawei released the Global Connectivity Index (GCI), a report that details the commitment and progress that various countries have made in bettering their own connections and the impact it is having on GDP.

The findings detail 25 developing and emerging countries, which account for 78 percent of global GDP and 68 percent of the world's population. It reviews 10 industries including finance, manufacturing, education, transportation and logistics, providing a quantitative assessment of connectivity and its value from both national and industrial perspectives. Huawei forecasts that by 2025, as many as 100 billion connections will be generated globally, 90 percent of which will come from intelligent sensors. This increase will be attributed to enterprises becoming enabled by the internet. By leveraging connectivity to streamline business processes, reduce costs and improve efficiency, enterprises will drive innovation and move the focus from a consumer driven internet to an industrial one.

The GCI study found that country connectivity correlates with GDP, with Huawei's analysis of 16 indexes showing that for each GCI percentage point increase the GDP per capital increases 1.4–1.9 percent, relatively higher for emerging countries. Among the countries surveyed, Germany ranks first due to its strong commitment and ongoing investment in information and communications technology (ICT) development, resulting in a market with competitive vitality.

Apple traffic on du network reaches new high after seamless iOS 8 upgrade experience

Following proactive steps taken by du to ensure a seamless upgrade experience to iOS 8 for Apple customers, du has noted that Apple traffic has, for the first time on its network, reached a new high – topped only by customers' consumption of online video. Compared to a regular day, iOS 8 upgrades caused an increase of 15 times in App traffic upgrades since its release at 9pm on 17 September 2014. In anticipation of the increased traffic iOS 8 upgrades would cause, du upgraded its Internet Content Delivery Network to avoid network congestion, and provide customers with the best possible experience.

On du's Fixed network, its Burj Khalifa PoP (Point of Presence), which services the area around the Burj, handled the highest volume of update downloads. However, many users chose to update using du's Mobile network, enabling their devices as a Personal Hotspot/ Tether, given the WiFi requirements of the iOS 8 upgrade.

Nawras family members graduate from 'Mahara' customer experience training program

Nawras has honored successful family members with a graduation ceremony their new customer experience training program, 'Mahara'. Running from November 2013 until April 2014, over one-third of the company, including Nawras Customer Champions and Store Champions, took part in the custom-designed courses led by international consultancy, B-business. Meaning 'Skill' in Arabic, the 'Mahara' program consisted of a series of three-day workshops with independent assignments and follow up coaching sessions. Targeting development in a dozen key areas of customer service including communication, motivation, increasing competitive edge and the level of customer experience, cross-selling and service recovery, Mahara has already had a positive impact on the level of service quality in both the Contact Centre and all Nawras stores across the country.

Mahara is one of many training programs Nawras conducts to cultivate transferable skills that fast-track the growth of its people within the organization and attract high-caliber talent.

PCCW Global and Telecom Malagasy collaborate to greatly improve connectivity into and out of Madagascar

PCCW Global, the international operating division of HKT, Hong Kong's premier telecommunications service provider, and Telecom Malagasy ("Telma"), the number one national telecommunications operator in Madagascar, have signed the first international MPLS interconnection for Madagascar. Telma is Madagascar's telecommunications leader in fixed, mobile, Internet, capacity (through the EASSY submarine cable and the 6,000km+ national fiber optic backbone), and mobile money.

This will result in Telma's Ethernet and IP VPN coverage being extended across PCCW Global's resilient MPLS network, which reaches 3,000 cities in more than 130 countries, plus connectivity to and from Madagascar via major submarine cable systems including EASSY.

The Governor of the CITC visits Mobily in Al Mashaer area

The Governor of Communications and Information Technology Commission, HE Engineer Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Darrab inspected the preparations of Mobily for the pilgrimage season of this year 1435H. Engineer Nasser Al Nasser, Chief Operating Officer and a number of Mobily executive leadership members were in his reception in Mobily's headquarter at Muzdalifah.

Engineer Al Nasser welcomed the Governor and reviewed the company's efforts exerted on all levels to continue the journey of success and achievements implemented during the previous Haj Seasons. Engineer Al Nasser clarified that the role played by Mobily to be very close to pilgrims in all places visited by them, whether through the main branches and outlets or through the POS deployed in the holy sites, airports, seaports and Miqat locations, noting that Mobily made a number of special offers and packages that allow the pilgrims to communicate with their families at competitive prices.

Tawasul Telecom announced a partnership agreement with Turk Telekom International

Tawasul Telecom, the leading provider of MPLS Networking Services in the GCC and the Middle East announced that it has signed a cooperative partnership agreement with Turk Telekom International (TTI), a dominant telecommunication operator in Central and Eastern Europe, Turkey, Caucasus, Middle East and Asia providing a full range of internet and data services, infrastructure, data center and voice services. The agreement was announced at the Capacity Eurasia2014 event hosted by Turk Telekom International and sponsored by Tawasul Telecom and held in Turkey on 16 & 17 of September.

Al Shakhs confirmed that the new partnership is yet another milestone achieved by Tawasul in 2014; it boosts the company's geographical expansion into new Eurasian market hence expanding its reach: "The signing of this agreement falls in-line with Tawasul's strategy for tactical expansion linking the GCC and Middle East to key markets in Eurasia".

Both Tawasul Telecom and Turk Telekom confirmed that the agreement between the two companies share their commitment to deliver state-of-the-art reliable and unparalleled services based on MPLS networking; it serves as a testament to their mutual strengths and destined efforts to provide topnotch services to their valuable customers.

Our customers have the full freedom to change their mind, so we have ensued there are no foreclosure (early termination) fees on termination before 30 days.

Experienced UAE Nationals invited to explore a variety of career opportunities within du

In line with its mission to support the UAE leaderships' vision of gainful employment and career development for UAE nationals, du has launched a recruitment campaign seeking talented Emiratis for leadership and supervisory positions within the company. Talented Emiratis with mid-level management experience are invited to apply to du, to explore the career potential with the promise of personal and vocational development through the company's tailored Self Development Programme.

du is looking for candidates to hire immediately across various departments. Eligible candidates should have 5-12 years of previous experience and also Bachelor or equivalent degree. Ibrahim Nassir, Chief Human Capital & Administration Officer, du, said: "We are looking for the next generation of ICT leaders for our company across key business functions such as Finance, Technology, Enterprise Business, Network, and Product Engineering, to name just a handful."

Furthermore, to reduce customers' exposure to out-of-bundle charges, Etisalat also launched three flexible Data Boosters for prepaid and post-paid customers – 100MB, 0.5GB and 1GB. The UAE's first-of-its-kind Data Boosters are a great 'in-between' option to upgrade data allowance after customers exceed their monthly data package allowances. As an example, if a customer subscribed to a monthly data plan uses most of the data allowance halfway down the month, the customer can top it up with a Data Booster. As a result, the customer can enjoy the sum of monthly balance and new booster data, both of which will be valid for the remaining duration of the monthly data plan.

Qualcomm Technologies, has announced the general availability of the LTE Broadcast Software

Development Kit (SDK) through the Qualcomm Developer Network. According to Qualcomm, the LTE Broadcast SDK is designed to empower software developers to create applications that harness the unique benefits of LTE Broadcast connectivity and content delivery on LTE Broadcast capable devices featuring Qualcomm® Snapdragon™ processors. Developers will be able to access a common application protocol interface (API) that can be used in all regions around the world that are trialing, testing or deploying LTE Broadcast.

Qualcomm said that the LTE Broadcast solution which is designed, optimized and integrated for Snapdragon LTE capable processors has been tested among the major infrastructure vendors over the past three years, resulting in a superior level of interoperability and product maturity.

Cisco delivers new Gigabit-Tier technology

Cisco has announced a new technology that will help cable multiple system operators (MSOs) to leverage their existing broadband infrastructure investment and offer a Gigabit-service tier. As the FCC initiated the "Gigabit City Challenge" to have at least one Gigabit community in all 50 states by 2015, communities nationwide accelerated efforts to get the highest Internet speeds possible for online multitasking and "multiscreening" video content. Cisco, a market and technology leader in cable broadband is helping to prove there are no technological barriers to satisfy bandwidth demand.

Ooredoo in free mobile broadband two-month offer with 4G device

Ooredoo has launched a special offer that gives customers free unlimited mobile broadband for two months, for every purchase of the company's 4G My-Fi device.

All customers who purchase an Ooredoo 4G My-Fi device from an Ooredoo Shop and activate the Unlimited Mobile Broadband package will be able to save QR800 and get free unlimited data for two months to share with friends and family. Using the My-Fi device, which costs QR599, customers will receive the Unlimited Mobile Broadband discount automatically in their bill cycle for the first two months.

Nazara to develop games based on Fox Star Studios' Bollywood titles

Mobile games company Nazara Technologies has signed a multi-movie deal with Fox Star Studios to develop games on the studio's upcoming Bollywood movies and prominent movies in latter's catalogue, reports Exchange4Media.

While the terms of the deal were not disclosed, this agreement will apparently give Nazara exclusive rights to develop games for Fox Star Studio across digital platforms like online, mobile and DTH. The first few games being built will be based on the recently released Finding Fanny and upcoming movies Bang Bang & Bombay Velvet. The games will be offered for free, as the company plans to monetize via in-app advertising, game embeds and in app purchases.

REGIONAL NEWS

REGIONAL UPDATES

Masdar and Khalifa Fund for Enterprise Development join forces to boost Emirati entrepreneurship

Batelco, the Kingdom's leading integrated Masdar has signed a framework agreement with the Khalifa Fund for Enterprise Development with the goal of enhancing opportunities for Emirati-led clean technology entrepreneurship. The agreement was signed by Dr. Ahmad Belhoul, CEO of Masdar, and Abdullah Al Darmaki, CEO of the Khalifa Fund for Enterprise Development, at Masdar. Together, the two organisations will explore areas of collaboration in the growing clean tech sector in Abu Dhabi and will work towards fostering greater business development expertise. With a clear focus on enabling Emirati entrepreneurs, the agreement capitalises on the synergies to be realised through closer collaboration, innovation and business development. It spans all relevant areas of clean tech enterprise activity encompassing different projects across Masdar, Masdar Institute and the Khalifa Fund. Masdar will support the Khalifa Fund in developing its most promising clean tech ventures. It will also refer Emirati entrepreneurs to the Khalifa Fund and will explore joint funding of pertinent proposals. Both parties intend to help Emirati entrepreneurs expand their networks in an effort to foster greater business enterprise across the U.A.E.

Facebook top social site in Oman

Facebook is one of the most widely used social media tools in Oman, a recently published report on GCC social media says. It is enjoying a tremendous adoption rate and has become mainstream in the consumer space across Gulf countries, including Oman, with strong Internet penetration among youth, a report published by Kuwait Financial Centre, 'Markaz', said. With around 480,000 Facebook and Twitter users in Oman, the report examines the trends in usage and penetration of Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter in the GCC countries. According to www.socialwatchlist.com, which monitors Facebook pages from across the Middle East and North Africa, Times of Oman is the only media house which figures in the top ten Facebook pages from Oman. Currently, Facebook is the most widely used social media tool in the GCC, with more than 16 million users (April 2014) in the region. Twitter and LinkedIn also have significant user base in GCC, with around 3 million users for each of platform.

Virgin Mobile launches services in Saudi Arabia

Virgin Mobile Middle East and Africa (VMMEA), part-owned by British

entrepreneur Richard Branson's Virgin Group, launched telecoms services in Saudi Arabia, beginning the biggest shake-up in the kingdom's telecoms sector in six years. VMMEA is launching two brands after benefiting from the national telecoms regulator's decision to order the country's three mobile operators to each host a mobile virtual network operator (MVNO) in an effort to stimulate competition. The two brands being launched by VMMEA are Virgin Mobile, aimed at the youth market, and Friendi Mobile, targeting Saudi's expatriate workers. As well as VMMEA's tie-up with STC, Jawraa Lebara partnered with No.2 operator Mobily. Dubai retailer Axiom Telecom did likewise with Zain Saudi, but the regulator subsequently ordered that licence to be retendered in a process still ongoing. VMMEA and Jawraa acknowledged that problems arranging interconnection with other operators and satisfying state security concerns had delayed their launch, but the regulator has now given VMMEA the go ahead, according to a company statement.

Tehran to host Iran Telecom 2014 in October

Tehran will host on October 6 to 9 the 15th International Exhibition of Telecommunications, Information Technology & Solutions (Iran Telecom 2014). A total of 280 domestic and foreign companies from 15 countries are to participate in the expo, IRNA reported. The foreign companies are from Italy, Slovenia, Austria, the UAE, Germany, Taiwan, Turkey, Czech Republic, China, Japan, South Korea, Canada, Poland, Malaysia and India. The participants are to showcase their latest achievements in the fields of communications, telecommunications and information technology. The expo will display antennas, telecom cables, equipment and systems for mobile phones, wireless, electronic and mechanical systems as well as satellite communication and paging technologies. Other items include multimedia, cable communication, satellite sending and receiving, voice mail, telephone communication and network systems and equipment, network security and e-trade software and telecommunication hardware.

JKOA wins top honors at Toshiba Annual Distributor Meeting

John Keells Office Automation (JKOA), the leader in office automation solutions, won top honors once again at Toshiba's Annual Distributor Meeting 2014 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, when it bagged the coveted 'Diamond' award. The company, which has received performance prizes for the past fifteen years consecutively, counts two Diamond Awards to its list of accolades, the highest form of recognition given by its principals. A subsidiary of the John Keells Holdings PLC technology arm, JKOA offers innovative products and services of the highest standards as the authorized distributor for world renowned office automation brands. The leading technology provider in the local market, it has been the authorized distributor for Toshiba Copiers since its inception in 1992, awarded by principals Toshiba Singapore Pvt. Ltd. "Our success at the regional meet is attributable to the efforts of our exceptional dealer network islandwide, who together with our sales team plays a significant role in Toshiba's local market growth," asserted JKOA CEO and John Keells Group Vice President, Janoda Thoradeniya, noting that the JKOA dealer network played a pivotal role in the company's success.

Saudi Arabia ranks 19th globally in creating a competitive ICT market

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia ranks 19th in terms of creating a competitive market, affordable services and excellent quality of service thanks to the country's significant investment into ICT, Huawei said recently in its Global Connectivity Index (GCI) report. As the only country named in the GCC, Saudi Arabia scored well in embracing digital reformation where businesses are most likely to have created and is in the process of executing company-wide transformation, recognizing ICT as the core enabler, the report noted. At its annual Cloud Congress (HCC) held in China, Huawei released the GCI report that details the commitment and progress that various countries have made in bettering their own connections and the impact it is having on GDP. The findings detail 25 developing and emerging countries, which account for 78 percent of global GDP and 68 percent of the world's population. It reviews 10 industries including finance, manufacturing, education, transportation and logistics, providing a quantitative assessment of connectivity and its value from both national and industrial perspectives.

Microsoft strengthens ties with ICTA

Microsoft Sri Lanka recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Information and Communication Technology Agency of Sri Lanka (ICTA) to facilitate a number of projects and activities involving information infrastructure systems and software research. The MoU would not only strengthen relations between ICTA and Microsoft, but will also result in constructive action through knowledge sharing and bringing together the considerable synergies of the two entities. A press release said: 'The primary objective of the MoU is to Exchange, develop and consolidate knowledge, information, practical skills, experience and technologies toward implementing joint programs to the government, centered around improving government productivity generally, with a specific focus on mobile applications, software process improvement and testing, digital rights management, cyber security, cyber threat intelligence security, computer forensics and business intelligence systems.

Telecom Egypt's CEO Nawawi still in office; say senior sources

Senior sources in Telecom Egypt (ETAL-CA) denied what was circulated around Atef Helmy's Minister of Information and Communication Technology request to TE 's board of directors for the dismissal of Mohamed Al-Nawawi, CEO and Managing Director of TE due to the company's delay in the participation of the unified entity of infrastructure. Sources added in statements to Amwal Al Ghad that the participation in unified entity is an investment decision by board of directors. TE 's ownership distributes between 80% public ownership and 20% Stocks listed on the EGX. Al-Nawawi has previously said TE will take part in any investments as long as it won't effect on the company's current investments.

The three mobile operators including Vodafone, Mobinil and Etisalat in addition to 8 ministries such as Investment, Finance, Defense, Trade and industry, ICT and planning ministries will take part in the Unified entity.

Zong launches Pakistan's first 4G network

China Mobile Pakistan (CMPak), which trades under the Zong brand name, has launched Pakistan's first 4G Long Term Evolution (LTE) network, Pro Pakistani reports. The Chinese-backed cellco's network covers Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Lahore, Karachi, Faisalabad, Peshewar and Quetta, and the operator intends to add 4,000 new cell sites by the end of the year with plans to invest USD1 billion in the network over the next three to four years. Zong was the only operator to win 4G-compatible spectrum in the frequency auctions held earlier this year, although

a rival operator, Warid, is set to launch LTE services using its existing spectrum holdings. Zong launched its 3G network in June and has signed up around 866,000 3G subscribers to its third-generation services. The cellco's 4G offerings range in price from PKR350 (USD3.35) to PKR3,500 per month for between 2GB and 30GB of data. Hybrid bundles are also available, bundling unlimited on-net calling and 500 SMS per day with data caps of 2GB or 4GB and costing PKR599 and PKR799 per month respectively.

Algerie Telecom secures approval for VSAT services

Algeria's government has issued a ten-year licence to fixed line incumbent Algerie Telecom for the provision of satellite services for broadband data and emergency services in the event of natural disasters, with an executive decree published in the Official Gazette No.49, dated 20 August 2014. According to Agence Ecofin, under the terms of the licence, the telco must cover 25 wilayas (provinces) by end-2015, extend the VSAT service to 36 wilayas in 2016, with national coverage (48 wilayas) expected by end-2017. Further, the executive decree states that the concession may not be transferred, although it could be renewed 'several times' for a period of five years each time.

Mr. Houlin Zhao
Deputy Secretary General
ITU

INTERVIEW

Houlin Zhao was elected ITU Deputy Secretary-General at the Plenipotentiary Conference in Antalya, Turkey, in November 2006. He was re-elected for a second four-year term in Guadalajara, Mexico, in October 2010.

Born in 1950 in Jiangsu, China, Mr Zhao graduated from Nanjing University of Posts and Telecommunications, and holds an MSc in Telematics from the University of Essex in the UK.

From 1999 to 2006, he served as Director of ITU's Telecommunication Standardization Bureau (TSB). During his term of office he spearheaded the introduction of new efficiency measures to improve ITU's standardsmaking environment and strengthen its promotion. He also enhanced the strategic partnership between Member States and Sector Members, while initiating and maintaining good relationships with industry members. Under his leadership, ITU enhanced its level of international cooperation with other standards development organizations, and was instrumental in helping bridge the standardization gap between developing and developed countries.

Q. What are your top three priorities for ITU and how do you see the Union's continued relevance in a hyper-connected world?

A. In a constantly changing environment, it is important to be able to adjust our order of priorities to respond to the situations we face. At this moment, I would like to highlight the following three priority areas.

ITU membership — I will continue to work to secure confidence and to enlist the support of ITU Member States, as well as to strengthen the participation of Sector Members, Associates and Academia in ITU activities.

ITU's effectiveness — I will increase the efficiency of ITU in order to meet new challenges, and will enhance our cooperation with partners to strengthen ITU's leading position in global ICT development.

ICT promotion — I will work to promote telecommunication and information and communication technology services to help achieve a better life for all. More than 4 billion people are still offline and they need to be connected.

Information and communication technologies (ICT) are key enablers of social and economic development and of an environmentally sustainable future for all of the world's people. The astounding growth that we have seen in recent years, particularly in mobile and ICT-enabled applications, will continue. The world of big data is evolving rapidly.

Meanwhile, end users are concerned about issues such as security, privacy, quality of service, and service charges. Service providers are facing challenges in regard to investment and the sustainability of business models. Regulators are focusing on the healthy development of markets. All these stakeholders will continue to play their roles in the future development of ICT, striving to maximize the benefits and minimize inherent risks.

In this environment, ITU will become ever more relevant.

Q. The ITU membership traditionally takes decisions on the basis of consensus. What approaches have you used in the past to build consensus?

A. Building consensus involves carefully listening to different parties, understanding their concerns and encouraging them to make compromises.

I have successfully used this approach on numerous occasions during more than two decades of working in ITU. To give just one example, as Director of the Telecommunication Standardization Bureau (TSB) I led discussions between ITU, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), and the

International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on harmonizing policy approaches to intellectual property rights. Through mutual respect and patiently addressing the concerns of each of these three organizations, I managed to steer the discussions towards consensus, leading to the adoption of a Common Patent Policy for ITU/ISO/IEC, still in use today.

Q. What do you see as ITU's aims in continuing to lead the World Summit on the Information Society?

A. The WSIS process was initiated by ITU Member States at the Plenipotentiary Conference in Minneapolis, United States, in 1998, and ITU successfully managed two phases of WSIS — one in Geneva in December 2003 and the other in Tunis in November 2005.

WSIS has modernized the concept of the information society across the globe. The annual WSIS Forum, which ITU organizes in coordination with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), allows Member States and other stakeholders to share their success stories and lessons of ICT development.

Because there are still many challenges and opportunities to be taken up by the global ICT family, I would support the efforts being made by our members for ITU to continue to lead the WSIS process beyond 2015.

Q. The United Nations post-2015 sustainable development agenda will address new challenges facing people and the planet. How should ITU contribute to shaping that agenda?

A. I led an ITU delegation to participate in the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), held in Brazil, in June 2012. I am very pleased that the resulting outcome document — "The Future We Want" — repeatedly highlights the importance ICT for sustainable development. "The Future We Want" underlines the need to improve access to ICT, especially broadband networks and services, and to bridge the digital divide.

The United Nations Member States are engaged in formulating a single development framework — the Post-2015 Development Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals.

We have to continue convincing stakeholders that ICT can play an important role in achieving the goal of sustainable development – which is to promote an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable future for the planet and for present and future generations.

We will actively participate in the United Nations process for future sustainable development. We will encourage Member States, industry members, non-governmental organizations and all stakeholders to join in our efforts to promote sustainable development through the use of ICT, and wherever possible we will join in their efforts to achieve the same goal.

Q. ITU's 150th anniversary in 2015 will be celebrated under the theme "Telecommunications and ICTs: Drivers of Innovation". What in your view are the three innovations in this industry that have most changed our world? And what do you see as the most significant technological innovation on the horizon?

A. Mobile-phone communications and the Internet are two recent innovations that have changed societies everywhere on the globe. Smartphones or cloud computing could be the third, but I would pick the liberalization of the telecommunication market and the introduction of market competition as an approach that has greatly contributed to the success of new technologies in today's world.

For the future, I would like to see devices with more intelligent functions, but that are simpler and easier to use.

REGULATORY NEWS

Regulatory News

TRA reveals an increasing up to 120,000 registrations in the UAE's national (.ae) domain

The UAE's Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) announces that the number of registrations on the national .ae domain increased over the last six months reaching 121,320. The UAE ranks as first in the region for the number of registrations within the nation's respective range. This apparent increase provides hard evidence that the prevalence of Arabic e-content is indeed rising. The significant increment indicates to the wider spread on Arabic content on the web, which is one of the main strategic goals of the UAE.

The surge of registrations has also been accompanied by a similar rise in demand for registration on the (.emirate)(.امارات). The domain names are available for individuals and businesses to enjoy the right of use for specific periods of time. The domain name usage is subject to terms and regulations consistent with the competent services agreement set by .aeDA, the regulatory body and registry operator.

.aeDA, the regulatory body and registry operator for the .ae domain, a subsidiary of TRA, was created to manage the national domain. It has also established the new sector's framework, which comprises of an administrative structure, clarifying each role, to guarantee a sustainable growth of the namespace and promoting competition by accrediting multiple .ae registered companies.

DoT moves Supreme Court against TDSAT's intra-circle roaming verdict

Department of Telecom has moved the Supreme Court challenging tribunal TDSAT's judgment that allowed Airtel, Idea and Vodafone to offer 3G services under a roaming arrangement in areas where not all of them own 3G spectrum.

"Legal opinion has favored challenging TDSAT judgment dated April 29 on 3G intra-circle roaming. DoT has sent [a] petition to [the] Supreme Court registry around a week ago for appeal against the judgment," an official source told PTI. Telecom Disputes Settlement and Appellate Tribunal had overturned a government ban on offering 3G mobile services beyond their licensed zones through roaming pacts, saying that it was in national interest to allow better utilization of scarce radio frequency.

The judgment had brought relief to the three operators - Airtel, Vodafone and Idea Cellular - who faced a penalty of Rs 1,200 crore for entering into pacts with each other to offer 3G services in regions where they did not win spectrum in the 2010 auction.

NCC to offer 5700MHz-6400MHz spectrum for small cell deployments

Taiwanese telecoms regulator the National Communications Commission (NCC) has reportedly decided to assign spectrum in the currently unlicensed 5700MHz-6400MHz band to those 4G operators wishing to deploy outdoor small cell base stations to enhance backhaul networks. According to the Digitimes, no charges will be made for frequencies in the aforementioned band, with operators wishing to claim spectrum needing only to apply to the regulator.

TRAI seeks public views to accelerate use of broadband services

In order to boost availability of broadband services, telecom regulator TRAI sought views from the public on ways to accelerate proliferation and use of high speed internet services in the country.

"The objective...is to discuss issues contributing to the poor broadband penetration in India and solicit stakeholders' views on actions required to be taken both by the Government and the service providers to accelerate the proliferation and use of broadband in the country," TRAI said in a consultation paper. The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India has also invited views on timeline to auction 700 megahertz band, most premium spectrum available for telecom services.

In the consultation paper, the regulator has sought views on the way cost of deploying various broadband technologies can be reduced, measures required to encourage content service providers to host content in the data Centre situated within India, issues in laying optical fibre, freeing spectrum bands for Wi-Fi technology etc.

The paper has been floated to meet objectives of National Telecom Policy 2012.

NTA directs Ncell to stop 'Twitter Zero'

The Nepal Telecommunications Authority (NTA) has directed Ncell to stop providing Twitter service for free citing the telecom company had extended the campaign without taking prior permission.

Ncell had launched Twitter Zero scheme, which allowed customers to browse popular micro-blogging site for free. The campaign launched in the last week of May was given continuity recently by Ncell after receiving good response from customers. Along with Twitter Zero, two other schemes that provide bonus in receiving international calls and give 100 SMS service at Rs three per day have also been instructed to be stopped. Going by the NTA provision, promotional tariff schemes are allowed only for three months and prior approval from the authority is a must for giving continuity, according to NTA officials. But browsing Twitter in Ncell network is a scheme that is not related to tariff issue, as per Ncell. NTA' s guideline for tariff approval for telecommunications services state that 'tariffs charged on customers for new features and facilities within licensed services shall have prior approval from NTA'.

Last year, Ncell had proposed a tariff for Twitter package. However, after NTA did not give a go-ahead to the promotional scheme, it had launched free Twitter campaign. Currently, a committee under Director Sharma is also conducting a study regarding different schemes.

NCA urged to fight the rise of SIM Boxing in Ghana

Ghana's National Communication Authority is being urged to consider reducing or taking away indefinitely the 19 cent being charged on international calls into the country.

Ghana charges 19 cent (67.08 Gp) per minute, one of the highest rates on international calls within the West African Sub region. With the current price of 19 cent the state is supposed to get 6 cents. But when the fraudsters channel the call through SIM boxes, they pay only between 3Gp and 15Gp and keep the difference. So the state loses the 6 cents (21.12Gp) and the telcos also get between 3Gp and 15Gp instead of 13cents (45.96Gp). This development has led to an increase in SIM box fraud, a practice where international call carriers prefer using unapproved routes to terminate international calls into the country locally.

Although efforts are been made to curb the increase of SIM boxing by the Ghana Chamber of Telecommunications, an industry expert Mr. Samuel Nii Narku Dowuona believes that National Communication Authority should lead the way by taking pragmatic steps to reduce the high price of international calls into Ghana.

US$6.5 million telecom towers unused in Afghanistan; watchdog wants answers

The top U.S. watchdog in Afghanistan wants answers on why the U.S. spent US$6.5 million on six communication towers that aren't being used and have so far led to one fatality.

According to a letter from John F. Sopko, special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction, the State Department pressed ahead with the towers despite doubts about their usefulness to the Afghans and opposition from the Pentagon. "Concerns were raised that Afghan telecom providers would not connect to the system, and that [the Department of Defense] did not want the towers because of the high cost of fueling the towers' generators," said the letter, which was sent to Secretary of State John F. Kerry. "Despite these concerns, the State Department moved forward with construction," Mr. Sopko said. State Department documents show that the purpose of the towers was "to expand and enhance media-provider coverage and telecommunication services to the civilian Afghan population in underserved and strategically important provinces via television, radio and telephonic mediums."

Now Mr. Sopko wants answers as to why the towers were built seemingly without an ultimate purpose in mind, and has asked the State Department to turn over more documents related to the planning and construction.

A SNAPSHOT OF REGULATORY ACTIVITIES IN SAMENA REGION

Regulatory Updates

Afghanistan

Board Chairman: Mr. Abdul WakilShergul [Afghanistan Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (ATRA)]

US watchdog the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction has criticized the State Department and the Department of Defense (DoD) for funding six telecom towers which have not been used and have led to one fatality, the Washington Times writes. In a note to US Secretary of State John Kerry, inspector general John Sopko pointed out that the US had spent USD6.5 million on the towers, despite notice from local telcos that they would not connect to the infrastructure due to security concerns – having received repeated threats from the Taliban – and that the DoD did not want to keep them due to the high cost of fuel to power the towers' generators. Nevertheless, the State Department had forged ahead with the construction of the towers, with a view to expanding telecommunication services 'to the civilian Afghan population in underserved and strategically important provinces,' ranking the infrastructure as one of the agency's 'highest strategic communication priorities.' Having been turned down by the DoD and local telcos, the state department considered handing over the towers to the Afghan government but decided against such action on the basis that Afghanistan continues 'to struggle with lacking resources and technical capacity to operate and maintain these towers.' Making matters worse, the towers were not equipped properly for air-traffic safety and a helicopter collision with one of the towers led to the death of an international security force soldier.

(September 18, 2014) telegeography.com

Afghanistan's telecom sector revenue declined by 12-13 percent in 2013, and will plunge another 5 percent this year, as foreign troops and middle-class Afghans leave the country, Reuters reports, citing a statement by Afghan operator Roshan. Ata released by the International Telecommunication Union shows that nearly 70 percent of Afghanistan's population has a mobile phone connection. However, Roshan's COO Altaf Ladak claims the real figure is closer to half that as many Afghans own several SIM cards so they can quickly switch to operators offering cheaper deals. According to Ladak, Roshan currently has 6.1 million subscribers, up from 5.8 million in 2012. Revenue amounted to US$ 300 million in 2012. Roshan's earnings are "pretty stable" and the company is profitable, Ladak added. Roshan plans to offset the impact of the market reduction by attracting more customers to its 3G mobile offering. Data services currently

account for 8 percent of Roshan's revenue. "We expect it (the market) to tick up again with money coming back and hopefully stability in the country. People are very cautious at this stage," Ladak said.
(September 10, 2014) reuters.com

Algeria

President: Mr. Toufik Bessai
[Regulatory Authority for Post & Telecommunication (ARPT)]

Algeria's government has issued a ten-year license to fixed line incumbent Algerie Telecom for the provision of satellite services for broadband data and emergency services in the event of natural disasters, with an executive decree published in the Official Gazette No.49, dated August 20, 2014. Under the terms of the license, the telco must cover 25 wilayas (provinces) by end-2015, extend the VSAT service to 36 wilayas in 2016, with national coverage (48 wilayas) expected by end-2017. Further, the executive decree states that the concession may not be transferred, although it could be renewed 'several times' for a period of five years each time. (September 29, 2014) samenatoday.com

Algerian Telecoms Minister Ms. Zohra Derdouri has revealed that the country's fixed telephony market could be opened up to competition 'soon'. The minister reportedly said in a press conference that they want to create real competitive conditions by installing one or more other operators for fixed [services]... as soon as this issue is ripe, we will inform the press of the details relating thereto. Another issue discussed at the conference was the potential entry of new mobile operators in the wireless market, which would diversify the services currently on offer and ultimately force the country's incumbent cellcos – Djezzy GSM, Mobilis and Ooredoo Algeria (Nedjma) – to upgrade the quality of their mobile networks. In March 2004 Algerian telecoms regulator ARPT, launched an abortive attempt to auction three licenses (known as 'inter-urban' concessions, since there was no requirement to cover the country's extensive rural population), but a lack of interest meant that the auction was called off. In March 2005 the regulator finally awarded the country's second national operator (SNO) license to Consortium Algerien de Telecommunication (operating as Lacom, but also referred to as CAT). Lacom's debut was not a success, however, and in August 2007 Lacom's owners revealed they were considering exiting the market due to heavy financial losses. Ultimately, after a number of failed attempts to sell their shareholdings, in November 2008 the international partners decided to liquidate the venture. Lacom's license was officially revoked in January 2010, opening up the possibility for it to be reissued at some later date. (September 11, 2014) Agence Ecofin

Bahrain

Chairman: Dr. Mohammed Al Amer
[Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA)]

Bahrain's competitive broadband market continues to deliver significant benefits to residential customers and small enterprises, through lower prices and more attractive service features such as higher service speeds and data allowances, according to a press statement issued from the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA). In May 2014, TRA's latest retail price benchmarking report showed that residential fixed broadband prices in Bahrain had fallen by up to 38% between 2012 and 2013, and mobile broadband prices by up to 65% over the same period. Broadband packages have continued to improve throughout 2014. Following the TRA's determination in March 2014 to deregulate the residential and small enterprise segment, prices were reduced significantly. For example, the price of a 10 Mbps ADSL service was BD80 in 2013, with a data allowance of 80GB, was reduced to BD30, and the data allowance was increased to 100GB, offering consumers more data for a lower price. The proportion of broadband subscribers in Bahrain on plans with advertised speeds of at least 2Mbps increased to 81% in 2013, compared to 72% in 2012 and 12% in 2007. According to TRA's latest consumer survey, the full results of which will be published shortly, the proportion of individuals using the internet reached 87% in 2014, up from 77% in 2011 and 53% in 2007. Consumer satisfaction with broadband pricing in Bahrain also increased to 87% in 2014, from 60% in 2011 and 36% in 2007. The competitive broadband outcomes which have been achieved for Bahrain end users have been recognized by a number of recent international reports. According to The Global Competitiveness Report (2014-2015) published recently by the World Economic Forum, Bahrain ranked 8th globally in terms of the proportion of individuals using internet and 5th in mobile broadband subscriptions per capita. Bahrain also performs well in terms of broadband affordability. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) has found that broadband penetration grows rapidly in those markets where the level of retail broadband price falls below 3–5 percent of average monthly incomes. Based on a report published by the World Bank in early 2014, "Broadband Networks in the Middle East and North Africa; Accelerating High-Speed Internet Access", Bahrain prices expressed as a percentage of GNI are below this threshold. The World Bank report identified Bahrain as the only country in the Middle East and North Africa region which has reached the mature stage in fixed and mobile broadband market development. The World Bank also acknowledged the increasing infrastructure-based competition in the supply of broadband services in Bahrain, with WiMAX-based competitors and more recently strong growth in mobile broadband. TRA's General Director, Mohammed Bubashait, commented on the development of a competitive broadband market in Bahrain. "TRA has taken a number of important steps over the last 12 months to facilitate a more competitive broadband market, including the release of additional spectrum in 2013 to support the development of higher-speed mobile broadband services, and the deregulation of the residential and small enterprise market for broadband services in 2014. It is encouraging to see the fruits of this work emerging in the form of improved consumer broadband offerings, as well as in the form of increased consumer satisfaction with prices and service quality." Bubashait continued to say that "TRA is proud to be at the forefront of regional efforts to liberalize broadband markets in order that consumers and businesses enjoy competitive and high-quality broadband services. We are delighted that international organizations such as the World Bank and the World Economic Forum continue to recognize the steps that

TRA has taken to stimulate competitive markets which in turn will continue to deliver the consumer outcomes that we have seen throughout 2013 and 2014."
(September 18, 2014) bna.bh

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority Bahrain (TRA) in cooperation with the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) organized a workshop on the Online Child Protection. TRA's Director for Cyber Security, Dr. Khalid bin Duaij Al Khalifa said "In various communities throughout the world, children have reached a stage in growth where they are capable of using the internet more skillfully, creatively and innovatively than adults, however, at the same time they are vulnerable to incomprehensible risks". He also said that "It is important to comprehend the possible risks likely to be met during internet usage in order to find solutions to this problem." He added that "This workshop will help assist all the relevant bodies to realize these risks and points of weakness in children in order to decide a framework for national bodies to invent appropriate tools to face this challenge for the sake of safety of children using the internet."The safety of children and teenagers is one of the important priorities and initiatives of the TRA which require nationwide efforts and cooperation of all the relevant bodies in order to take all the necessary actions which ensure the safety of children using the internet. (September 14, 2014) bna.bh

Bangladesh

Chairman: Sunil Kanti Bose
[Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC)

Bangladesh, which aims to launch its first communications satellite by 2017, has agreed to move forward on bilateral cooperation with India in the field of space technology. The decision, announced at the recently held third round of the India-Bangladesh foreign ministers' Joint Consultative Commission (JCC) meeting, will help Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) realize the country's aim to have its own satellite to support telecommunications and broadcasting services. India's Joint Secretary (BM) said: "We have had very preliminary discussions at the technical level with Bangladesh. We have put the offer on the table that whatever returns they feel that they can gain by collaborating with us, whatever be the form, we have given them more or less a carte blanche to tell us what they would like to do. So, we are awaiting their response to it." The decision follows a recent visit to the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) by Indian Prime Minister. The PM said he wanted the benefits of India's significant expertise in science and technology and space to reach other developing nations, especially member-nations of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). He also called for ISRO to design a satellite suitable for SAARC member states.
(September 26, 2014) rapidtvnews.com

Egypt

Executive President: Eng. Hesham El Alaily
[National Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (NTRA)]

Egypt's government approved the release of unified telecoms licenses, clearing the way for operators in the country to offer fixed and mobile services for the first time, albeit more than two months later than planned. The government approval of unified licenses means incumbent operator Telecom Egypt will be able to offer mobile services for the first time, while mobile operators Vodafone Egypt, Mobinil and Etisalat Egypt will be clear to begin offering fixed-line services in the market. An original June 30 activation date for the licenses passed, meaning the final approval is over two months later than planned. Telecom Egypt pushed for the unified licenses in a bid to stem declining use of fixed lines in the country as consumers turn to mobile and web-based communications, Reuters reported. The government also extended the time frame for Telecom Egypt to sell its 44.95% stake in Vodafone Egypt, giving the operator until December 2015 to offload the stake. Egypt's regulator - the National Telecom Regulatory Authority - originally said the holding must be sold within 12 months of issuing the combined licenses. Telecom Egypt in May agreed to pay EGP2.5 billion (€268 million/$349 million) for its license, despite the terms stating that the operator will not receive new mobile frequencies, including those covering 4G (LTE). Although the unified licenses allow Egypt's mobile operators to enter the fixed telephony market, the decline in demand for fixed services means there is little incentive for the wireless operators to take up the option. Telecom Egypt's net profit in the six months to end-June slipped from EGP1.7 billion in 2013 to EGP1.5 billion in 2014, despite rising revenues. The operator showed signs of improvement in the second calendar quarter, however, with net profit of EGP1 billion compared to EGP895 million in the second quarter of 2013. (September 4, 2014) totaltele.com

Egypt's government approved a long-awaited plan to issue a unified landline and mobile telecoms license, opening the way for fixed-line monopoly Telecom Egypt to offer mobile phone services. The license had been due to be activated on June 30 but that date passed without implementation. In May, Telecom Egypt agreed to pay 2.5 billion Egyptian pounds (US$350 million) for permission to offer mobile services. It has been waiting for the details of the unified license to be finalized. Egypt's three existing mobile service providers, Vodafone Egypt, Mobinil and Etisalat Egypt, have been eating away at Telecom Egypt's business as more Egyptians opt to use mobile phones and the Internet instead. Telecom Egypt has been relying on its data business to boost revenue and has been waiting to launch a new mobile operation to rival the other players in the sector. Telecom Egypt was originally given a one year to sell its stake in Vodafone Egypt, once the unified license was activated. The government said on Wednesday Telecom Egypt would now have to sell the stake by December 2015. The government also set up a committee on Wednesday comprising representatives from the ministries of telecommunications, finance, investment, commerce and others, to look at the best way for Telecom Egypt to exit Vodafone Egypt. (September 3, 2014) Reuters.com

Iran

Minister of Communication & Information Technology: Mr. Mahmoud Vaezi
[Communication regulatory Commission (CRC)]

The Iranian government is facing criticism over its decision to award further licenses for 3G mobile services. Conservative politicians and religious leaders are condemning the expansion plans, saying the technology will encourage political unrest and undermine Islamic beliefs via the wider availability of social media and mobile video platforms. The cleric Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi has condemned the Communication Ministry's licensing plans and has reportedly issued a fatwa banning any attempts 'to expand the speed and multimedia capability of mobile networks,' which he says are against 'religion, morality and humanity'. President Hassan Rouhani is prepared to lock horns with his opponents as he is keen to promote the wider availability of communications networks and loosening of restrictions on internet use. The country's third national cellular licensee, Rightel, has just seen its two-year exclusivity period on 3G services come to an end, and rival operators MTN Irancell and state-owned Mobile Communication Company of Iran (MCI) are eager to launch their own 3G systems.
(September 2, 2014) Asharq Al-Awsat

Jordan

Chairman of the Board of Commissioners/ CEO: Mr. Mohammad Al Taani
[Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (TRC)]

Revenues generated by the ICT sector in 2013 dropped by 4 per cent to $2.2 billion compared with $2.3 billion a year earlier, according to a recent survey. Telecom revenues for 2013 declined by 6.4 per cent in 2013 to $1.582 billion compared to $1.691 billion in 2012, according to the 2013 ICT and IT Enabled Services (ITES) industry statistics' survey conducted by the ICT Association of Jordan (int@j) and the ICT Ministry. In spite of the drop in overall revenues, the IT sector registered positive growth in 2013, with revenues growing by 3 per cent to $638 million, compared with $617 million in 2012. Of the total IT revenues, domestic revenue accounted for $313 million in 2013, registering a 1 per cent decline, compared to 2012. IT exports grew by 8 per cent in 2013 to $324 million compared to $300 million in 2012, according to the survey. Telecom sector employment declined by 384 jobs in 2013 to 4,212, while the IT sector created 277 new jobs, making the total 11,637. The ministry and int@j differed over the reasons behind the drop in the telecom sector's revenues, which caused the overall decline in 2013 revenues for the ICT sector. "The drop in telcos' revenues and profits is due to the technological shift and the usage of some applications such as Viber and Whatsapp, which reduced people's reliance on voice services... There are good and bad years for telecom operators," ICT Minister Azzam Sleit told reporters. "They need to provide new convincing services for customers to increase their revenues," he added. "The drop in their revenues is part of a global trend. We cannot guarantee telcos a certain percentage of revenues or profits. This is life and there are ups and downs," the minister noted. Jawad Abbassi, chairman of int@j, agreed that the usage of some applications affected revenues of telecom operators, but said doubling the tax on mobile phone subscriptions from 12 per cent to 24 per cent and increasing the electricity tariffs played a key role in the decline of telecom companies' revenues. "After the tax, mobile users reduced their spending by around 7 per cent, which affected telcos' revenues and profits," Abbassi said. Many lost their jobs due to the decline in revenues, and "even advertising companies were harmed" as telcos cut a lot of their spending, he noted. Sleit said the ministry is currently conducting a study on the impact of raising the tax and is in the process of collecting figures from concerned entities such as the Income and Sales Tax Department. The survey indicated 26 per cent of Jordan's total ICT exports were to Saudi Arabia, followed by the US (21 per cent), Iraq (12 per cent), Nigeria (7 per cent), the UAE (6 per cent), the British Virgin Islands (5 per cent), Palestine (4 per cent), Qatar (2 per cent), Morocco (2 per cent) and Lebanon (1.5 per cent). The rest of the exports were distributed over 37 regional and international countries. According to the survey, foreign direct investment registered in the sector in 2013 reached $2.4 million compared to $4.1 million in 2012. (September 10, 2014) jordantimes.com

Kuwait

Minister of Communication: Eisa Ahmad Alkandari
[Ministry of Communication (MOC)]

Kuwait is set to lead the Middle East in unlocking new mobile broadband business opportunities, according to companies attending GITEX Technology Week 2014. According to the recent Ericsson Mobility Report, mobile subscriptions across the Middle East and Africa (MEA) are set to grow from 1.2 billion in 2013 to 1.9 billion in 2019 – when 80% of global mobile subscriptions will be for mobile broadband and more than 50% of global mobile data traffic will come from video content. Additionally, the MEA region is poised to post the world's strongest mobile data traffic growth at 70% from 2013-2018, according to Cisco's Visual Networking Index: Global Mobile Data Traffic Forecast. With the country's 156.9% mobile subscription penetration placing it among the top three MEA rankings in the World Economic Forum's Networked Readiness Index 2014, Kuwait – which boasts 100% nationwide mobile network coverage – stands to benefit from high mobile broadband demand and usage. "Streaming video and social media on mobile devices and cloud services will drive an immense amount of data traffic through the GCC and especially Kuwait," said Mohammed Kazmi, Senior Manager, Product Development & Marketing, Zajil Telecom. "Today our data centers across the region are hosting cloud services that will support the region's next generation ICT based economies – from mobile apps and video calls to business applications and Big Data," he added. Zajil Telecom is among more than 300 Kuwait companies joining GITEX Technology Week's Gulfcomms – the gateway to the region's telecoms industry – which is sponsored by Ericsson and organized by the Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC). With the Kuwaiti parliament recently approving a bill to create an independent telecom regulator, the country's telecoms industry is set to undergo further revenue-generating changes which will attract international firms. "The largest and most important platform for enterprise telecoms, GITEX Technology Week's Gulfcomms brings together operators, solutions providers, infrastructure builders and end-users all under one roof," said Trixie LohMirmand, Senior Vice President, DWTC. "Kuwait's communications leaders will showcase mobile innovations across vital GCC sectors like energy, retail and hospitality," he added. Running under the theme 'Re-Imagining our Future', GITEX TECHNOLOGY WEEK 2014 is set to attract more than 142,000 ICT professionals, 25,000 C-level executives and over 3,700 exhibitors from 61 countries. The show will be held from 12-16 October at DWTC. (September 24, 2014) ameinfo.com

Viva (Kuwait Telecom Company) is said to have received regulatory approval to list on the local stock exchange, almost six years after the company completed an initial public offering (IPO). The company made the announcement in a market filing, although it has not specified when it expects to actually join the bourse. Viva previously staged an initial public offering (IPO) in July 2008, going on to raise KWD25 million (USD$94 million) in a sale open to Kuwaiti nationals only. A commercial launch of GSM-900/1800 services across the capital Kuwait City followed on December 3, 2008.

(September 1, 2014) reuters.com

Lebanon

Acting Chairman & CEO: Dr. Imad Hoballah
[Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA)]

Telecommunications Minister Harb unveiled a new strategy to modernize and upgrade the fiber optics network in order to increase the Internet speed. Speaking at a news conference at the Telecommunications Ministry, the minister said the project involves replacing the current copper network with fiber optic cables. Eventually these will reach all houses, residential units, offices, buildings and sidewalks. "We have actually launched six pilot projects which rely on various techniques and methods, in collaboration with international manufacturers who provided advanced and free equipment to develop the service in different neighborhoods of Beirut and in some Lebanese regions," Harb explained. The minister said he wanted to enhance the cooperation between the private and public sectors to improve the telecommunications sector in the country. "I have decided to convene a one-day meeting with officials from the ministry, Ogero Internet service providers and Internet cable providers to discuss all the difficulties facing this sector and to review some laws pertaining to the telecoms sector," Harb said. But the minister did not say how much the project would cost or how long it would take to switch from copper to fiber optics in Lebanon. Former Telecommunications Minister Charbel Nahas had called for more investments in infrastructure and a switch to fiber optics, but the plan never materialized due to lack of funds. Harb admitted that the Internet has not improved in some areas because the service points are not fully equipped to handle high speeds. Lebanon has one of the worst Internet speeds in the world despite investments that successive governments have made in marine cables. "As everyone knows, the Internet service, or the broadband, which is better known as DSL, can only be introduced through the landline networks. But some of the service points are not equipped with DSLAM [equipment]," Harb said. He accused his predecessors of suspending maintenance contracts with Ogero, saying this caused enormous damage to the network and services provided to citizens. Harb stressed that since he took office the ministry and Ogero installed 56,769 new landlines and that work continues to install more. The minister also highlighted that he has reduced Internet prices and increased capacity. Some experts say that increased data consumption has drastically affected Internet speed in many areas, arguing that it would have been better to switch from copper to fiber optics before deciding to reduce the prices. (September 6, 2014) The Daily Star

Morocco

Director General: M. Azdine El MountassirBillah
[Agence Nationale de Reglementation des Telecommunications (ANRT)]

Moroccan telecoms operators Inwi (Wana) and Medi Telecom (Meditel) have reportedly accused fixed line incumbent Maroc Telecom of failing to fully meet its obligation to publish an updated technical and tariff wholesale offer for passive access to its fixed local loop. The two alternative providers have claimed that the Moroccan incumbent has only provided wholesale offers for virtual unbundled local access (VULA) and fiber access, and has yet to publish offers that cover shared cabinet access, full and partial unbundling and bitstream access. Further, Wana and Meditel have disclosed that Maroc Telecom's partial compliance means that they would struggle to launch services over its infrastructure by the end of the year. Moroccan telecoms regulator ANRT published a decision dated June 17, 2014, which established the rules governing local loop unbundling (LLU) in Morocco. Under the new regulations, Maroc Telecom is required to provide colocation for third-party operators' equipment in its existing cabinets, install multi-operator cabinets for part of their future nodes and establish an active wholesale offer for third-party operators under a VULA model. Further, the ANRT gave the former monopoly operator a deadline of August 1 to provide a wholesale offer to Meditel and Inwi.

(September 22, 2014) Agence Ecofin

Nepal

Acting Chairman: Mr. AnandaRaj Khanal
[Nepal Telecommunication Authority (NTR)]

The government of Nepal has renewed the mobile operating license of privately-owned carrier Ncell allowing it to operate GSM services for the next five years. This is the first license extension for the firm, previously known as Spice Nepal Private Ltd, since it acquired its concession and launched services ten years ago. Ncell's license expired on August 31. The Nepal Telecommunications Authority (NTA) said it decided to renew the concession given that the cellco has been making regular payments on its GSM license over the past two years. The renewal fee is NPR20 billion (US$208.5 million) and Ncell has been making regular installments of NPR2.5 billion over the past two years, it said. (September 1, 2014) The Himalayan

Oman

Executive President: Dr. Hamed Al-Rawahi
[Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA)]

All mobile phone numbers remain the property of Oman government, therefore, users or customers are forbidden to resell them, Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) has said. "We wish to clarify that residents and citizens of Oman may own a telephone number but they are not authorized to sell them," a statement from the TRA said. The TRA clarified that telephone numbers are public resources. "It is the intention of TRA to educate subscribers that the payment of fees in acquiring these numbers does not bring about the transfer of ownership to the party or the person who has been allocated the number. The TRA reserves the right to withdraw any number allocated to the user if required in public interest," it said. According to the law, trading or relinquishing of special numbers is prohibited. "As an exception, these numbers may be relinquished after a fee payment of OMR20 to the authority in accordance with the following cases and conditions -- between spouses or first degree relatives on condition that the marriage or the relation is proved, these numbers can be relinquished to new employees by companies after the services of one of their employees is terminated," the official said. When contacted, an official of Nawras refused to comment but voiced support for the TRA's rules and regulations and emphasized that laws are made for the benefit of consumers. Another mobile operator stated on its website, "All telephone numbers are a national resource controlled by the TRA. Numbers may, in the future, be changed, blocked or recalled and we must comply with the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority's and other official agencies requirements. If requested, you may keep the same number when changing to another service provider." Despite this advisory by TRA, mobile phone numbers are still being offered for sale on various websites and in Ruwi High Street, with some numbers referred to as "VIP numbers" for hundreds of rials. "We can get you some numbers which are very special and very easy to remember, but you have to pay a price for them," said an agent in Ruwi High Street.
(September 2, 2014) zawya.com

Pakistan

Chairman: Dr. Syed Ismail Shah
[Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA)]

Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel) has refuted reports circulating in Pakistan that its local subsidiary, Worldcall Telecom, is experiencing difficulties, the Times of Oman reports. Omantel claims that the company is providing services as usual, although it acknowledged that the telco is involved in a dispute with the regulator, the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority (PTA). The watchdog issued a determination order last week to temporarily suspend Worldcall's wireless in the local loop (WiLL) license, but Worldcall successfully appealed against the decision and the Lahore High Court issued a stay order on the suspension. PTA issued the order on the basis that Worldcall had failed to pay outstanding spectrum fees for 2011 and 2012, totaling around PKR69.1 million (US$667,310). Omantel added that the management of Worldcall Telecom is working with the PTA to resolve the issue.
(September 16, 2014) telegeography.com

Qatar

Executive Director: Mr. Graeme Gordon
[Communications Regulatory Authority (CRA)]

The Communications Regulatory Authority (CRA) issued an Advertising Code to monitor advertisements and promotions of related products and services in Qatar. The Code will further enhance the transparency of the ICT sector, and make it more effective for the consumers to make informed decisions while subscribing to telecom services in Qatar. The Advertising Code clarifies the obligations of telecommunications service providers towards increased consumer protection. The Code also specifies how the CRA will ensure compliance. The Code requires that advertisements and information provided to consumers should be fair, truthful and accurate, and should not be misleading. This obligation is underpinned by more detailed provisions for advertisements comparing competing products, special offers, broadcast advertisements, etc. "We, as the independent communications regulator in Qatar, understand that growth in the telecommunications market would lead to an increased amount of marketing effort to promote products and services," said Saleh Al Kuwari, Chairman of the CRA Sub-Committee. "As observed from the type of complaints received from consumers this increase in marketing activities has led to confusion. The Advertising Code strives to address these concerns." One of the key requirements in the Code is that direct marketing such as via telephone calls, text messages, and emails, must be non-intrusive. Therefore advertisers who are subject to this Code must limit the number of contacts on a daily basis. Additionally, any such contact should take place at an appropriate time so as not to disturb consumers. Finally, advertisers must give consumers the option to opt out of receiving any further advertisements of this kind without any cost to them. (September 29, 2014) The Peninsula

Saudi Arabia

Governor: Eng. Abdullah A. Al Darrab
[Communication & Information Technology Commission (CITC)]

Virgin Mobile Middle East & Africa (VMMEA) has begun services in Saudi Arabia. In a shake-up to the kingdom's mobile market, the Communication and Information Technology Commission of Saudi Arabia (CITC) has ordered each of the country's three mobile operators to host an MVNO to boost competition. VMMEA has launched two brands in the market: Virgin Mobile targeted at the youth segment, and Friendi Mobile aimed at expatriate workers. VMMEA is partnering with Saudi Arabia's STC, while Jawraa Lebara has teamed up with the country's second biggest operator Mobily. Similarly, Dubai retailer Axiom Telecom entered into an agreement with Zain Saudi, but the license has since been put up for a retender by the Saudi national regulator. The whole process of setting up MVNOs in the Saudi market hasn't gone without some difficulties. VMMEA was first awarded the license by CITC in March,

and at the time the company said it was expecting to launch operations in Saudi Arabia with the first half of 2014. There have, however, been some problems in arranging interconnection with the other operators, and satisfying state security concerns have also caused delay. Saudi Arabia is only the second country in the gulf region to allow MVNOs, with only Oman having launched such services earlier. VMMEA, which is partly owned by British Virgin Group, also has operations in Oman, Jordan, South Africa and Malaysia. It is expected other countries in the region will follow Saudi Arabia's example, and start allowing MVNOs.
(September 30, 2014) telecoms.com

The Consultative Assembly has urged the Communications and Information Technology Commission (CITC), to take steps to reduce telecoms tariffs in the Kingdom, as the current charges reportedly account for 30% of an average person's income. Assistant President of the Council pointed out that a study conducted by the Saudi Consumer Protection Association (CPA) in 2013 found that Saudi Arabia has some of the world's highest telecoms tariffs. In May 2013 the CPA published the results of a survey, which found that prices in the Kingdom were among the highest in the world, with a rate of SAR0.35 (US$0.093) per minute, compared to an average of seven Saudi halalas (US$0.019) per minute in the rest of the world. The CPA's survey figures represented 'costs for all communication services, including the internet.' (September 3, 2014) Arab News \

Sri Lanka

Director General: Mr. Anusha Palpita
[Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (TRC)]

Sri Lanka's Minister of Mass Media and Information, Keheliya Rambukw, has told the cabinet that the country's transition from analogue to digital terrestrial TV (DTT) broadcasting will begin by the end of this year and be completed by 2020. The five-year plan to achieve nationwide DTT is based on the Japanese Integrated Services Digital Broadcasting-Terrestrial (ISDB-T) standard, supported by a loan of LKR17 billion (US$130.5 million) from the Japanese government, while the Sri Lankan government has budgeted a further LKR4 billion in funding for the project. Under the plan, DTT will be introduced initially in the Western and Northern provinces by 2016. The process will free up certain frequencies (the 'digital dividend') for 4G mobile broadband services. (September 23, 2014) RapidTVNews

Sudan

Minister: Tahani Abd Allah Atia
[Minister of Communications and Information Technology (MOCIT)]

Zain Sudan is waiting for government permission to launch an LTE network. Once approval is received, the Kuwaiti-owned cellco could begin offering 4G services within four months, as much of Zain's mobile broadband network is already able to support the technology. Data (excluding SMS) currently accounts for 11% of the operator's revenue, but this was expected to rise to 15% in 2015. Zain has raised annual employee wages by an average of 15% to mitigate inflation in Sudan, which was as high as 46.4% in August. Sudan lost around three-quarters of its oil output when the South seceded in July 2011, ending its main source of state revenue and foreign currency. As a result, the country's wireless operators – Zain, South Africa's MTN Sudan and locally-owned Sudatel – face a number of challenges, including a shortage of foreign currency, a significant drop in the value of the Sudanese pound (SDG) and soaring inflation. (September 23, 2014) Reuters.com

Tunisia

President: Mr. Hassoumi Zitoune
[National Telecommunication Commission (I NTT)]

The National Telecommunications Commission (INT) has issued a statement denying that measures are being taken to impose a block or a charge on free over-the-top (OTT) voice-over-internet protocol (VoIP) apps such as Skype and Viber. The watchdog said that it had not received any formal request from the operators to implement such changes, adding that INT 'ensures that telecom operators meet mandatory conditions... especially regarding net neutrality.' INT's statement followed reports that had circulated in local media that Orange, Ooredoo and Tunisie Telecom (TT) would from October 1 introduce a new offering whereby subscribers would have to pay to have access to OTT VoIP apps. According to the reports, the trio had agreed to implement the measures in response to falling revenues from their traditional services as a result of the increasing use of the aforementioned apps.
(September 19, 2014) telegeography.com

Turkey

Chairman & CEO: Dr. Tayfun Acarer
[Information & Communication Technologies Authority (BTK)]

Dubai-based Delta Partners Capital has announced that a definitive agreement has been signed for an investment of up to EUR10 million (US$12.9 million) in Virgin Mobile Central and Eastern Europe (VMCEE). The investment will be carried out through the Delta Partners Emerging Markets TMT Growth Fund II. Meanwhile, the International Finance Corporation (IFC – a member of the World Bank Group), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and CEE Mobile Capital (spearheaded by Dick Kiphart of KGC Capital) are also participating in this round of funding; the precise terms of the transaction have not been disclosed. Alan Gow, CEO of VMCEE, noted: 'Having an investor with the industry expertise and MVNO-specific experience of Delta Partners Capital is of clear benefit to VMCEE. We look forward to working closely with our shareholders in order to capture the significant opportunity for growth that exists in Poland, Turkey, and across the region.' The capital will be used to fund the further growth and international expansion of VMCEE. Following the investment, Kai-Uwe Ricke, chairman of Delta Partners Group, will join the board of VMCEE, while Boris Nemsic, executive partner at Delta Partners Capital, and the former CEO of both Telekom Austria and Vimpelcom, will join the board of Virgin Mobile Poland. Virgin Mobile Polska launched in August 2012, and currently piggybacks on Play's network. While the company has yet to commence operations in Turkey, it stated its interest in entering the MVNO sector in September 2012, going as far as participating in negotiations with mobile market leader Turkcell. Virgin is now expected to target a 2015 launch, while the group's VMCEE unit also harbors plans to launch in countries such as Kazakhstan and Hungary.

(September 17, 2014) telegeography.com

Turkish President has approved a bill giving telecoms authorities more power to monitor online users and block websites, the latest move tightening state control over the Internet. The new measures, contained in a bill that was submitted to parliament by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), come after the introduction of a law in February making it easier for authorities to block access to web pages without a court order. This was limited to "attacks on privacy" but the new law, approved late Thursday, strengthens these powers and allows the telecoms authority TIB to block websites "to protect national security, public order and to prevent crime" without a court order. The law raised eyebrows coming just a week after Turkey hosted a major UN-backed forum on Internet governance, where some participants denounced the Turkish government's "draconian" curbs. Reporters Without Borders said that it "showed that the Turkish authorities are ready to go even further down the road of Internet censorship". "By increasing the possibility of blocking sites in this way, the authorities are yet again reaffirming their determination to control the Internet," it said in a statement. The main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) has fiercely opposed the law and has vowed to continue the fight in the Constitutional Court to overturn it. President who was elected president last month after ruling Turkey as premier for over a decade, has made no secret of his disdain for social media, comparing it to a "murderer's knife" and once famously vowing to "wipe out" Twitter. The government temporarily blocked Twitter and YouTube in March after they were used to spread audio recordings implicating President and his inner circle in a corruption scandal. The move sparked outrage both at home and abroad and triggered concerns that President was seeking to increase his powers to silence critics and accelerate a slide towards authoritarianism. (September 12, 2014) timesofoman.com

United Arab Emirates

Director General: Mr. Mohamed Nasser Al Ghanim
[Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA)]

In response to recent news reports about a ban on Viber, the free Internet calls service, the UAE's TRA has issued a statement clarifying the status of the service in the country. "We have recently seen local newspapers and social networks publishing news with regards to the 'Viber' service being blocked in the UAE," reads the statement from the UAE TRA. "We would like to clarify that the service was never licensed in the UAE," the TRA states categorically. VoIP services in the UAE continue to remain the prerogative of the country's two licensed telecom providers, and global online services are not allowed and are encrypted. "The VoIP regulatory policy has only licensed 'Etisalat' and 'du' (the licensees) to provide telecommunication services in the UAE, including VoIP services. This policy still exists and has not been amended," the TRA statement states. This is in line with TRA's last year's announcement, wherein it had announced in another statement that the Telecommunications Law and the TRA's VoIP regulatory policy "allows only the licensees (i.e. 'Etisalat' and 'du') to provide telecommunications services in the UAE including VoIP services." While Skype's text messaging is allowed in the country, its VoIP calls remain encrypted and barred. The TRA added in its statement that "this policy has not been amended" as a clarification to rumors that Skype VoIP calls were being made legal. "As to what the licensees have done in unblocking Skype's website www.skype.com in the UAE, this action does not change the position of the TRA or amend the policy as this service is considered a Regulated Activity, therefore, it must be provided by a licensee. "Should the service be provided through a partnership with a third party, both Licensees must seek approval to provide such service after fulfilling the regulatory and technical requirements of the TRA, which has not happened in the case of Skype. VoIP services through Skype are still unauthorized," TRA had then said. Recently, rumors about WhatsApp offering free VoIP calls to its 600 million monthly active users have been gaining traction as new leaks point out the inevitability and imminence of the new service. "The leaked images of the upcoming user interface show that the app has been enabled with other language translations which will be displayed at the time a person receives a call via WhatsApp," a new report on the popular gaming site The Fuse Joplin says. Various reports now suggest that Facebook is investing a huge amount of its revenue in revamping WhatsApp's relationship with various service providers and in establishing a better connectivity over the Internet. (September 3, 2014) Emirates 24|7

Dr. Fatimetou Mohamed-Saleck

Candidate for Deputy Secretary General of ITU

INTERVIEW

Dr. Fatimetou Mohamed-Saleck has extensive managerial experience in the public and private sectors. She is a fervent supporter of the values of the ITU, in line with the vision of the Secretary of the strategic objectives of the ITU and the support of the governing bodies. She is Mauritania's candidate for Deputy Secretary-General of ITU.

Dr. Fatimetou has a PhD in Applied Mathematics and also holds Engineering degree in Computer Sciences. She is Professor of Computer Science and Applied Mathematics at the University of Nouakchott, Mauritania.

Dr. Fatimetou is part of a successful telecommunications services company. She is the former Secretary of State for New Technologies in Mauritania. Dr. Fatimetou is a well-known international figure in the ICT and Telecoms industry with broad international exposure. She is an International Consultant in ICT Development Policies. Dr. Fatimetou has a number of research publications to her name and associated with many professional networks and associations.

Q. As a candidate for the post of Deputy Secretary-General of ITU, what lies at the core of your global priorities?

A. International Telecommunication Union's role is becoming ever more critical as we advance into the world of hyper-connectivity. There are various standards related issues, for example, that still require to be addressed to make machine-to-machine (M2M) interaction ubiquitous, secure, and reliable. Until communications networks, which enable machine-to-machine interaction, operate at levels of high quality and efficiency, true potential of the new digitally hyper-connected world, of which M2M is a subset, would not be realized in a timely fashion. The Union thus has much direct involvement in catalyzing knowledge-driven resolutions to complex regulatory and business matters, in continuing to drive consensus, and to remain persistent in both addressing emerging issues as well as seeing into the future of telecommunications over the next decades.

My priorities, in which I firmly believe we can and must make progress, are not much different from what the Union itself considers important. However, as a global organization, there are many factors and dimensions that the Union must take into account, given its interaction with Member States and the modes to act on and react to their national as well as international requirements and issues that may take precedence over internal priorities. In such cases, priorities will be set forth by the Union's leadership. In any case, given an opportunity to assume a leadership role, I shall find ways to align my areas of priority with those of the Union.

Q. How can developing countries contribute toward fulfilling ITU's evolving global vision?

A. Developing countries have very special needs, and their collective experiences in dealing with infrastructure development challenges, meeting broadband goals, defining new ICT policies with measureable impact, and search for socio-economic progress through ICTs, for instance, provide varying and important perspectives to all the Member States. As contributors of new experiences and perspectives, developing countries can make substantial difference in our collective strides to define and realize future progress of telecommunications and of our world.

Q. What in your view are the three innovations in this industry that have most changed our world? And what do you see as the most significant technological innovation on the horizon?contribute toward fulfilling ITU's evolving global vision?

A. I consider mobile payments, cloud computing, and portable connectivity to be among the major innovations that truly have transformed the world, and which are increasingly adding strong value to the day-to-day lives of the people of the world. While new technologies, many of which may be disruptive to those being used today, will continue to be introduced, in my opinion, the next innovation, or a set of innovations, will come in the shape of new business models, which the telecommunications service providers will have to use for the securing their future business and for meeting digital agenda requirements that their respective governments will have put forth for them.

Q. What needs to be done to bring more women into leadership positions, and how can our youth be involved in ICT development matters?

A. The global women population is an important resource and wholehearted efforts should be made to nurture, filter, and elevate the talent that such a large human resource offers. Women's ICT and leadership skills should be built, which should ensure that they are able to communicate in both oral and written forms, negotiate and resolve issues, and are able to generate effective networking results. By exposing them to international experience, and giving them the opportunity to work at leading positions, while celebrating their diversity and inherently different human nature, new perspectives should be allowed to be created and assessed, objectively. Women of different cultures should be brought together under unifying platforms to encourage collaboration and the develop soft skills, which cannot be built in classroom environments. Moreover, mentoring programs should be set up across industries, targeting specifically women's capacity-building. An entrepreneurial spirit should be infused into women's thinking and problem-solving routines.

Similarly, our young people are our future. This future must be protected and empowered.

I would like to work with young people of the world, to expose them to ICTs, and to empower them through age-specific knowledge, essentially building among them a self-protecting mindset.

We live in very challenging times, rife with human-introduced and natural challenges and threats. Thus concerted efforts are required to work with young citizens of the world and to also actively engage with those entities that are working in favor of young people, in order to ensure that youth elements are catered for. If elected as Deputy Secretary-General of ITU, I would aim to bring young people in ITU by creating young ambassadors, who will be mentored in various ICT areas and who will then be expected to mentor their peers. A culture of self-protection and youth mentoring is what I shall aim to create at ITU.

Q. SAMENA Council is a consensus-driven industry body, with a goal to bringing together all stakeholders from the industry and from the digital value-chain to redefine our future plan of action on various issues. How do you view consensus-building?

A. I personally believe that all efforts should be exerted to achieve unanimous consensus. However, more often than not, it is an immense challenge to achieve such a desired outcome. Thus, attempts are always made to settle for an overwhelming, majority settlement to an issue.

Throughout my professional tenure, I have maintained a "facilitative" mindset where I felt I had little or no direct stake in the matter; a "mediative" approach, where it was clear that the agreement required much more than table-talk and had to be settled with my direct interaction with all the concerned parties involved. I have had the experience of settling issues, where the identification of the right participants, clarity on the agenda, and fundamental rules of discussing that agenda toward realizing desired outcomes, were a big challenge. In follow-up to such settlement of issues, I have also had the privilege to monitor the agreed upon implementation work.

Regardless of the approach exercised or required to be implemented, however, my focus has always been on creating value, and doing the maximum possible to ensure that maximum value is created in achieving closure on the matter.

It is the idea of value-creation that I view as a hallmark of consensus-building. I do feel SAMENA Council is performing this much-needed role within the telecommunications and ICT industry not only in the region but globally.

REGULATORY ACTIVITIES BEYOND THE SAMENA REGION

Regulatory Updates

Argentina

Four companies will take part in Argentina's 4G spectrum licensing contest later this year, the government has revealed. Three major mobile operators - Telefonica's Movistar, Telecom Argentina unit Personal and America Movil-owned Claro - and broadband provider Arlink submitted applications to take part in the process, the Secretaria de Comunicaciones (Secom) announced last week. "We have taken the next step in the allocation of 4G spectrum," communications secretary Norberto Berner said, in a statement. A prequalification commission will now analyse the bids. According to local media reports that process will take until the end of October. The winners will be announced in mid-November. Mobile operator Nextel was not on the list of bidders, Argentina's Infobae pointed out. Neither was media company Grupo Clarin. A spokesperson for Nextel, whose parent company NII Holdings filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection last week, told the Argentine publication, that it could not commit to the required investment at the present time. Argentina is selling spectrum in the 700-MHz band and the 1700-2100-MHz advanced wireless services (AWS) band for 4G services. It also plans auction outstanding 3G spectrum in the 1900-MHz and 850-MHz band. When it published its 4G auction conditions in May it decreed that successful bidders will be required to cover 98% of the population within five years. (September 22, 2014) totaltele.com

Australia

An Austrian court will decide by November whether to annul an auction for mobile frequencies which brought the state 2 billion euros (US$2.6 billion) in 2013, but which some telecom companies say was flawed, a court spokesman said. Hutchison Whampoa's Austrian unit Drei and Deutsche Telekom's T-Mobile appealed against the results of the auction, which was then Europe's most expensive for fourth-generation (4G) frequencies per head of population. The two operators sought a re-run of the auction, arguing its conditions were designed to maximize returns at the risk of weakening competition. Each of the three bidding parties was allowed to bid for up to 50 percent of the spectrum on sale, meaning one could have been shut out completely - although the regulator said it would not have allowed that to happen. Telekom Austria paid the most (1 billion euros), while Drei emerged with no spectrum in the valuable 800 megahertz range used for long-range communications and for penetrating the walls of buildings, effectively limiting its appeal to urban and suburban areas. (September 25, 2014) reuters.com

Brazil

The government expects revenues of 8.2 billion reais (US$4 billion) from this week's auction of six licenses to operate 4G mobile phone services. Telefonica, Claro, TIM and Algar will bid for concessions of bandwidth in the 700 MHz range currently used for analogue television. Brazil's broadcasters are required by law to shift to the digital format by 2018. Telecom regulator ANATEL confirmed the participation of Brazil's three largest mobile providers: Telefonica, a subsidiary of Spain's Telefonica; TIM, controlled by Telecom Italia; and Claro, a subsidiary of Mexico-based America Movil. The fourth entrant, locally-owned Algar Telecom, operates in the states of Goias, Minas Gerais, Mato Grosso do Sul and Sao Paulo. Three of the licenses to be auctioned will grant rights to provide nationwide service. A fourth excludes certain municipalities and the remaining two cover areas in the central region of Brazil.
(September 30, 2014) latino.foxnews.com

Nextel Brasil, a unit of troubled US-based group NII Holdings Inc, has decided not to participate in Brazil's auction of 4G-suitable spectrum in the 700MHz band, but is looking to take part in the sell-off of regional surplus frequencies, expected to take place in mid-2015. As the country's regulator Anatel confirmed that Telefonica Brasil (Vivo), America Movil's Claro (Brasil), TIM Participacoes (TIM Brasil) and Algar Telecom (formerly CTBC) had submitted bids by the September 23 deadline – Oi SA having been the other major player opting not to take part – Nextel Brasil explained that although it will not compete for the lower frequency bands on offer, it will however look to bid on 1800MHz blocks in Greater Sao Paulo next year. The frequencies on offer formerly belonged to the now defunct Unicel do Brasil Telecomunicacoes (Unicel, trading under the banner Aeiou). ANATEL's 700MHz auction failed to attract a newcomer or a foreign operator, as expected by the federal government and local telecoms authorities.
(September 25, 2014) telegeography.com

Telecoms watchdog ANATEL is unlikely to amend the terms of the forthcoming 700MHz frequencies auction, despite grumbling from a number of domestic operators – including Telefonica (Vivo), Claro and TIM Brasil – over certain contentious rules they would like to see 'suspended'. The board of ANATEL met and its head Joao Rezende, says that the regulator will review the operators' complaints. However, the online journal notes that on previous occasions the watchdog has ignored complaints centered on disagreements over the rules of the auction – notably at the auction of 4G 2500MHz spectrum, when cellcos also complained about some of the terms and conditions. The country's federal audit court TCU has already given the green light to the terms – approving them last week (with minor caveats) – although the carriers are still concerned that the rules set a minimum for (but do not place a cap on) the amount of money cellcos would have to distribute among TV broadcasters, which are vacating the 700MHz band, for things such as cleaning up the spectrum and installing interference-mitigation filters. They have also balked at the requirement that existing 4G licensees (i.e. the big four) must make an 'extra payment' and a rule that means they must wait for twelve months after the analogue switch-off before they can use the 700MHz for 4G. Bids will be received on 23 September, with the tender slated to begin one week later, on September 30.
(September 8, 2014) BNAmericas

Following the announcement just a few days ago that French media group Vivendi had entered into exclusive talks to sell its Brazilian broadband, pay-TV and fixed telephony operator Global Village Telecom (GVT) to Telefonica. The Brazil's antitrust watchdog Cade could examine the deal in tandem with the Spanish telecoms group's proposal to exit Telecom Italia (TI), 'depending on how the deals are presented to regulators'. With Telefonica having indicated it would divest any interest it has in TI once it completes the acquisition of GVT, and with the antitrust watchdog preparing to analyze the Spanish group's mooted purchase, Cade President was cited as saying: 'If in the middle of the transaction, there is the Telecom Italia stake that could be traded between Telefonica and Vivendi, it will be analyzed as part of the entire deal.' Telefonica's role as a shareholder in TI has long been questioned by the Brazilian government. In December 2013 Cade ruled that the Spanish company must relinquish its direct and indirect stakes in local mobile operator TIM Participacoes (TIM Brasil) or find another new partner for its own directly controlled telecom operation in the country. In its ruling, Cade noted the Madrid group's failure to comply with the terms of a performance agreement – signed in 2010 – in which it promised not to participate in TIMBrasil's management decisions or raise its stake in TI. In a further blow, Cade imposed a BRL15 million (USD6.3 million) fine on Telefonica for increasing its stake in Telco Holding – which owns 22.4% of the Italian giant – and fined TIM Brasil BRL1 million for appointing a consultancy company owned by the Spanish telco. (September 4, 2014) Reuters

Bulgaria

The Communications Regulation Commission (CRC) is reportedly planning to revoke the wireless concession for a 2×8MHz block of spectrum in the 1800MHz band that was granted to start-up 4G Com (4DZI Kom) in December 2011, due to the company's 'non-payment of fees'. The would-be operator failed to pay the one-off fee of BGN30.4 million (US$19.8 million) alongside its annual contributions since the award date. The start-up now allegedly owes the regulator BGN34.87 million, after paying just BGN360 of the total sum, in June 2014. In late 2011 4G Com won a technology neutral wireless concession in the 1800MHz band, worth BGN30.4 million. The start-up, which is understood to be wholly owned by Ultra Com BG, was initially expected to utilize the spectrum for mobile broadband services based on Long Term Evolution (LTE) technology, although since then no developments on the deployment of a network have been reported. In March 2014 local media reports suggested that the company was up for grabs for around BGN35 million-BGN36 million, hinting that the would-be operator obtained the frequencies in order to resell them. (September 11, 2014) Daily Capital

Canada

The telecom regulator began hearings into whether Rogers, Bell and Telus are overcharging their smaller competitors for access to their networks, thus raising prices for consumers. In 2013, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) examined wholesale roaming rates -- the rates wireless companies such as Wind, Mobilicity and Quebecor pay the Big Three when their customers travel outside their network coverage area. The CRTC found "clear instances of unjust discrimination" in the rates and

Caribbean Telecommunications Union

Dealing with threats by Caribbean telecom networks to ban 'over-the-top' (OTT) services would be a priority for telecommunications ministers, who meet in St. Kitts, September 22 to 26, for the annual meeting of the Caribbean Telecommunications Union (CTU). According to Mr. Pierre Bowrin, policy adviser in the Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunications, over-the-top services, such as WhatsApp and Viber, have already been banned by LIME and Digicel in Jamaica. Ministers fear a cascading effect throughout the region. "In a region that has a large diaspora population, and where most cannot afford ordinary rates for telecommunications, the banning of such services would have an adverse effect for many people and their families," explained Mr. Bowrin. Reaching consensus on how to move forward on this matter would be a significant achievement of the meeting said Bowrin. According to some technology experts, Internet Service Providers (ISPs) have argued that over-the-top communications services undermine future investment potential, while driving higher user demand on telecommunications networks that further places pressure on ISPs to improve bandwidth technologies. On the other side of the debate, app developers and users have indicated that changing the present arrangement could threaten freedom of expression, as well as create access discrimination and degrade the openness and freedom of the Internet. "It's a debate that inevitably has reached the Caribbean region, and it is a real concern," said the Policy Adviser Bowrin. Meanwhile, Bowrin said the opportunity of the CTU meeting in St. Kitts is being used to rejuvenate the St. Kitts and Nevis ICT Week of Activities, which first started as a month of activities in 2008. He disclosed that a new thrust is being undertaken to engage various segments of our citizenry in today's digital communications technologies. "There would be seminars that target various groups, for example, the differently able persons, youth and senior citizens, so that as many persons are included in acquiring the skills through digital literacy. All ages must be able to participate in the global digital society," said Bowrin. Issues to be discussed during the week of activities would include cyber security and cyber incident responses that are said to be "critical to ICT Policy development in the Caribbean". Identifying gaps and weaknesses in existing national ICT Policies would be done on the basis of leading practices and experiences of the Caribbean region, Bowrin explained. The Caribbean Telecommunications Union, the Organization of American States, the Government of Canada and the Government of St. Kitts and Nevis are collaborating to host the series of ICT developmental workshops, as well as the CTU meeting. (September 9, 2014) thestkittsnevisobserver.com

Chile

Telecom regulator SUBTEL is set to launch a US$2.3 million project to roll out internet services to rural areas. The Telecommunications Development Fund (FDT) will manage the disbursement of the funds and the project, dubbed Wi-Fi 3 will deliver Wi-Fi internet in isolated regions. The project will complement the Wi-Fi 1 and Wi-Fi 2 programs which saw services rolled out in VI (Maule), VII (Bio Bio), IX (La Araucania), and XIV (Los Rios). (September 16, 2014) TeleSemana

Costa Rica

The telecoms watchdog SUTEL has established new regulations to minimize unexpected costs to end-users for international roaming services. Under the new rules, operators must immediately send a free text message to customers as soon as their phone connects to a foreign operator, detailing the prices for using voice, data and text services. The message must also include local and international contact numbers for assistance and a website where the subscriber can access all the details of utilizing roaming services. Subscribers should also be given several options to place limits on their consumption whilst roaming internationally, and receive notification when they have reached 80% of that limit.

(September 2, 2014) telegeography.com

Czech Republic

The Czech telecoms sector witnessed the emergence of 15 mobile virtual network operators (MVNOs) during the first half of the year, while ViralMobil became the first MVNO to cease operations. According to an unverified report, as of June 30, 2014, a total 71 virtual operators offered services within the Czech Republic. The eastern European nation boasts one of the continent's busiest MVNO markets, despite only permitting resellers to launch in October 2012. Keen not to be left behind, the Czech Republic's mobile network operators (MNOs) have established their own 'no-frills' secondary brandings to exploit niche market segments. As such, last month it was revealed that T-Mobile's 'Kaktus' brand and Vodafone's 'Oskarta' unit had both passed the 50,000 subscriber milestone.

(September 4, 2014) Telecompaper

European Union

Caps on the amounts mobile network operators in Europe can charge one another for network access could be ditched next month, should new EU proposals be adopted. According to reports from inside the union, a move to deregulate wholesale roaming fees was approved by the EU's member states on September 23, 2014 and is expected to be finalized in mid-October. This follows intense lobbying from the mobile phone industry, with the likes of Vodafone and EE having pressured the EU to reduce regulation in the European market. Olaf Swantee, the latter's Chief Executive, has claimed cuts to wholesale roaming fees cost the operator £42 million in the first half of 2014. The Financial Times reports that cuts to the prices paid by consumers are still planned when the system is next reviewed in 2016, but the deregulation will make smaller operators liable to higher costs when connecting their customers abroad. ETNO, a lobbying group that counts Deutsche Telekom, Orange and O2 owner Telefonica among its members, welcomed the proposals in a statement that argued the move was essential to help operators maintain profits amid pressure to compete with data-based services like Skype. "Competition from alternative platforms and over-the-top services are today well established, and this recommendation is the right instrument to adapt regulation to the new market reality," it said.

(September 26, 2014) cable.co.uk

EU telecoms regulators reportedly want to rid the industry of price caps on fixed calls in an attempt to open up and boost the European sector, which is considered weak compared to the US and Asian markets. Welcomed by (ex-) incumbents, the proposal, which would allow carriers to set their own tariffs, is not being received so well among the smaller telcos, such as TalkTalk and Sky, who fear the move could lead to higher prices and worse margins for them as they heavily rely on the bigger players' networks by renting out capacity. It has been reported that carriers like Telefónica, Orange and Telecom Italia have said the move would provide a much needed boost to decreasing fixed call revenues not only reduced by the current price caps but also by the overall decrease in the use of landlines, as well as OTT services such as Skype and various conference call services and messaging apps, leading to fewer mobile calls and texts, and ultimately fierce competition and price cuts. According to the European Telecommunications Network Operators' Association (ETNO), the major telcos' fixed telephony revenues dropped by €5 billion in 2012 alone. The new plans put forward by EU regulators could come into effect as soon as next month, depending on the European parliament's approval. However, EU member states will still have the right to decide for themselves whether to abolish price caps or not. While incumbents have apparently said scrapping the price caps would allow more investment to high-speed broadband infrastructure, helping to catch up with the US market, the German national regulator has been reported confirming it would continue to operate within the current price parameters whatever the EC's decision on price caps. ETNO, whose members include such big players as Deutsche Telekom, Orange, KPN, Telefonica, Telecom Italia and TeliaSonera, has voiced full support to the EC's recently started ICT and telecoms overhaul in Europe. "We share [EC] President-elect Juncker's view that if we are to build a stronger economy for Europe, we need a stronger digital sector. We believe it is time for a new approach: more growth-enhancing policies and less traditional regulation to benefit both European citizens and businesses," Luigi Gambardella, ETNO Chairman said. The new rules could come into effect pretty soon but it remains to be seen which of the 28 EU countries' own regulators will actually adopt the freer approach to fixed call pricing. With all the other pressures telcos are facing in the form of European mobile call, text and data pricing caps, as well as the increasing use OTT services, it remains to be seen how much of a difference the removal of fixed call price caps can make.

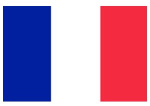
(September 19, 2014) telecoms.com

Ministers from 5 European nations are about to ink an agreement that would lead to a roaming free zone in the region, the Montenegro Ministry of Telecommunications said. Under the deal, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, Macedonia and Turkey would remove roaming charges by January 2015. Included in the zone are Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Except for Turkey, all the six zones were once part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic. The regional regulatory agencies of the five nations will meet in Macedonia to tackle how to create the Balkan cost-free roaming zone. The zone would be a big help to nationals of the seven areas as well as other visitors since the cost of mobile roaming in the Balkans is up to six times higher than other parts of Europe. The plan would complement the strong pressure from the Europe Union Commission on telcos to normalize their rates. Ahead of the establishment of the roaming-free zone, Montenegro completed in early September the initial phase of the project that would make available free WiFi in six Macedonian cities. The initiatives are part of the EU move to implement rules as these Balkan nations prepare for accession to the regional bloc to ensure tourists in the zone won't get phone bill shock due to high roaming rates. Many tourists are shocked to receive their astronomical phone bills after returning from an overseas trip because of roaming charges. Due to the need to stay connected, travelers often set their Smartphones on roaming mode whenever they go abroad, allowing them to access their emails as well as social media sites. This need for connectivity, in turn, has led telcos to expand their facilities to meet the continuous growth in data demand. But putting up antennas and other infrastructure requires capital spending, which the telcos recover by charging high roaming fees.

(September 5, 2014) au.ibtimes.com

The European Commission recommended that the EU safeguard access to spectrum below 700MHz for digital terrestrial television until 2030. But the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) has expressed concern about the early release of the 700MHz frequencies. The EC group chaired by former European Commissioner and WTO Director General Pascal Lamy looked at future use of the UHF spectrum band between 470 to 790MHz and addressed discrepancies between the internet service provider community and the broadcast community, which both have designs on the sub-700MHz spectrum. The report suggests that the 694-790MHz band, which is currently used by terrestrial broadcasting networks, should be dedicated to wireless broadband across Europe by 2020. But it also suggests that EU should adopt a common position against the co-primary allocation of the core audiovisual band (470-694MHz) to the mobile service at WRC 2015. However, this compromise was not enough to appease the broadcast sector, which expressed concern that the 700MHz band be released to other stakeholders, especially mobile phone operators, by 2020 with the flexibility of plus or minus two years. "There is a danger that this will not give broadcasters and viewers enough time to adapt to appropriate spectrum arrangements and ensure the necessary upgrade of DTT networks and consumer equipment, especially in countries where DTT is the main TV platform," said Simon Fell, the EBU's Head of Technology & Innovation. The broadcasting industry argues that an early release date is likely to cause disruption to TV services in a number of Member States, especially where, owing to the lack of capacity, the transition reduces the volume and quality of content offered to viewers. The EC report notes that because of the "recent assignments in the 800MHz band, the 700MHz band is not immediately needed for mobile services" and proposes a "stock take" by 2025 to provide a factual basis for future policy decisions on spectrum allocation. The EBU believes this should include all relevant market and technology developments as well as all relevant frequency bands for terrestrial broadcasting and mobile broadband. (September 2, 2014) telecoms.com

France



Telecoms watchdog the Autorite de Regulation des Communications Electroniques et des Postes' (ARCEP's) newly established sanctioning body – Reglement des Differends de Poursuite et d'Instruction (RDPI) – has initiated 19 proceedings against eleven of the country's fixed and mobile operators for failure to meet their respective obligations. The watchdog officially regained its power to sanction with Decree No. 2014-867 of August 1, 2014; under the new provisions, different members of the ARCEP executive board are assigned different tasks in order to ensure that the principle of separating investigative and sanctioning powers is met. The RDPI comprises four board members, including the chairman of ARCEP, and is tasked with adopting decisions on formal notices, investigations, dispute settlements and inquiries, while the remaining three board members

FTTH

A new, first-of-its-kind study released today by the Fiber to the Home (FTTH) Council Americas finds that communities with widely available gigabit access have per capita GDP that is 1.1 percent higher than communities with little to no availability of gigabit services. The study examined 55 communities in 9 states, finding a positive impact on economic activity in the 14 communities where gigabit services are widely available. "Gigabit communities are empowered communities," said FTTH Council president Heather B. Gold. "The study results suggest that gigabit broadband communities exhibit a per capita GDP approximately 1.1 percent higher than the similar communities with little to no availability of gigabit services. In dollar terms, this suggests that the 14 gigabit broadband communities studied enjoyed approximately $1.4 billion in additional GDP when gigabit broadband became widely available. As we look at these study results, we can clearly conclude that every community should be a gigabit community. The study, conducted by the economic, financial and strategy firm Analysis Group found widespread gigabit availability contributes to the economies of communities in multiple ways, including through the direct effect of infrastructure investment and increased expenditures, as well as shifts in economic activity (e.g. job creation and occupational changes) and productivity gains. Communities with widely available gigabit access are gaining control over the factors that shape the lives of their residents, businesses and institutions. Conversely, the 41 communities in the study that didn't have widely available gigabit broadband likely experienced forgone GDP in 2012 of as much as $3.3 billion.

(September 18, 2014) ftthcouncil.org

Georgia

The Georgian National Communications Commission (GNCC) has announced that PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) Central Asia and Caucasus has been awarded the contract to establish the value of spectrum in the 800MHz, 900MHz, 1800MHz, 2100MHz and 2600MHz frequency bands. The professional services firm beat off three other companies, namely DotEcon, Detecon International and SBR-Net & Consulting, in the tender, which was launched on 12 August. The contract was signed on September 9, and PwC is obliged to submit its reports within five weeks. The GNCC notes that the methodology developed by PwC will be used to determine the initial value for new 4G Long Term Evolution (LTE) licenses, as well as for the extension of existing concessions. (September 15, 2014) telegeography.com

Germany

The European Commission and Germany's telecoms regulator could be heading for a major clash over the country's latest proposed reductions in mobile termination rates, which remain among the highest in Europe and produce millions of euros in revenue a year for Germany's mobile operators. Ongoing efforts by the European Commission have seen MTRs come down in a number of European countries, but the Bundesnetzagentur seems to be stubbornly sticking to a path that will only gradually reduce rates from 1.79 eurocents per minute in 2014 to 1.66 eurocents per minute in 2016 and will therefore not comply with the principles and objectives of EU telecoms rules. "If the German regulator has done this, it is basically declaring war," a Commission official told. "They know they are breaking the spirit of every agreement we have made, and possibly the law itself." The Commission has clashed with the German regulator before over its MTR strategy, and in April issued a call for the country to lower its rates. "The vast majority of the EU Member States apply termination rates which are beneficial for consumers and competition. I insist that Germany complies with telecoms regulation and follows the same approach as other regulators. It is not acceptable that one regulator continues to hamper the proper functioning of the single telecom market," said Neelie Kroes, European Commission vice president responsible for the Digital Agenda, in a statement in April. According to a snapshot of termination rates issued by the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC) in January this year, Germany's MTRs are above average for the European Union with proposed cuts well below European guidelines. BEREC said the weighted average in January was 1.31 eurocents a minute. In France, for example, the rates are as low as 0.8 eurocents/minute. However, rates in Luxembourg were a whopping 8.576 eurocents in January. The Bundesnetzagentur said its proposal to reduce MTRs over the next two years was the result of an intensive review during recent weeks. It added that the proposed rates would also ensure sufficient leeway for network operators (such as Deutsche Telekom, Vodafone Germany and Telefonica Germany) to invest in mobile broadband networks, particularly LTE. What will happen next remains unclear? The Bundesnetzagentur is seeking comments on its proposal until 1 October this year. Kroes said that 17 EU Member States had implemented pure long-run incremental cost (LRIC) modeling to set mobile termination rates by the beginning of August 2014. She added that the Commission may consider appropriate follow-up actions against individual Member States to ensure compliance with the EU regulatory framework.

(September 5, 2014) The Financial Times

Ghana

Minister of Communications, has reportedly hinted that the National Communications Authority (NCA) has created four new license categories: Mobile Virtual Network Operator (MVNO), Unified, Interconnect Clearinghouse and International Wholesale Traffic (IWT), with a view to boosting competition. The minister disclosed that the aforementioned authorizations would each be open for competitive bidding, although he stopped short of revealing when they would be put up for grabs. No further details were revealed regarding the precise number of licenses to be issued under each category, nor the obligations of the telcos and potential amendments to the regulation framework; an official announcement is expected to be published next week. Previously, the NCA announced in July 2013 that it was planning to start issuing MVNO licenses, prompting a number of Ghanaian companies to submit authorization requests; the NCA subsequently suspended the process. Ghana's wireless market is home to six mobile operators – MTN Ghana, Vodafone, Millicom Ghana (Tigo), Airtel, Glo Mobile and Expresso – and around 35+ internet service providers (ISPs). All of the cellcos have been awarded mobile cellular licenses and also hold international gateway license authorizations (except Expresso). However, only two providers – Vodafone and Airtel – are licensed to provide fixed telephony and broadband services. The potential introduction of a Unified License would level the playing field by allowing all of Ghana's mobile network operators (MNOs) to also provide fixed line services.

(September 8, 2014) Ghana Web

Greece

All three of Greece's mobile operators (Cosmote, Wind and Vodafone) have applied to take part in the country's upcoming spectrum auction. The Hellenic Telecommunications and Post Commission, known locally as the EETT, plans to sell off six blocks of 2x5 MHz of 800-MHz spectrum and 14 5-MHz blocks of paired 2.6-GHz spectrum. It also aims to auction four 10-MHz blocks of unpaired 2.6-GHz spectrum. In August, the watchdog revealed that it aims to raise upwards of €380 million for government coffers from the process. In a statement on Monday, the EETT said it has received applications from Vodafone, Wind Hellas and Cosmote, the mobile arm of incumbent operator OTE. The winners are due to be announced by October 16. Successful bidders will receive 15-year licenses that come into effect from February 28, 2015. However, they will have access to the spectrum from 1 November to enable them to conduct trials and pilot projects. (September 17, 2014) totaltele.com

GSMA

The GSMA has called for the EU to move more quickly in releasing broadcast spectrum for mobile broadband services. In response to an EU report recommending the 700 MHz band spectrum be available for mobile services from 2020, the industry group said it would like to see EU states auction the frequencies between 2018 and 2020, or even earlier, in order to respond to the sustained growth in mobile data traffic. It's also concerned about the recommendation that a decision on releasing the 470-694 MHz frequencies for mobile services not be taken until 2025. According to the GSMA, this could put Europe at a competitive disadvantage compared to other regions activating the spectrum earlier. It called for the European Commission to accelerate the review process for the sub-700 MHz band, to no later than 2020. It would also like to see the EU support at the World Radiocommunication Conference in 2015 a dual allocation for these bands, for use by both broadcast and mobile providers, so some states are allowed to move earlier on auctioning the spectrum if needed. The report by former European commissioner Pascal Lamy recommended that such a resolution at the WRC be opposed by the EU. His position received the backing of the European Broadcast Union. The EBU also welcomed the recommendation that the sub-700 MHz frequencies be maintained for broadcasting until at least 2030. The broadcasters are also concerned the schedule proposed for refarming the 700 MHz band is too quick and may not give broadcasters and consumers enough time to transition digital terrestrial TV services. In some states, not enough capacity is remaining for the services, meaning possible disruption to existing DTT services from the refarming. Furthermore, as the 800 MHz band has only recently become available for mobile services, an additional 'stock take' of spectrum use should be taken in 2025 before any further decisions, according to the EBU.(September 2, 2014) Telecom Paper

Honduras

Telecoms watchdog the National Telecommunications Commission (CONATEL) has launched public auction in order to allocate Long Term Evolution (LTE)-suitable spectrum in the 700MHz frequency band. Under the terms set out by the resolution, the regulator is looking to award one 2×15MHz paired block in the 733MHz-748MHz and 788MHz-803MHz bands (Block C). In October 2013 CONATEL awarded LTE-suitable spectrum in the 1700MHz and 2100MHz bands to America Movil and Millicom, operating in the country under the Claro and Tigo brands, respectively. Claro won Block B2, comprising of 2×20MHz paired blocks (frequency division duplex, FDD) in the 1730MHz-1750MHz and 2130MHz-2150MHz bands, with a US$12.05 million bid, while Block B1, which comprised of 2×20MHz paired blocks in the 1710MHz-1730MHz and 2110MHz-2130MHz bands was granted to Tigo for US$12.055 million. Block B3 was reserved for state-owned telco Hondutel for use after its anticipated privatization, as ordered by the president, Porfirio Lobo Sosa. B3 comprises of 2×20MHz paired blocks in the 1750MHz-1770MHz and 2150MHz-2170MHz bands. Tigo plans to launch 4G LTE services in the third quarter of 2014. (September 17, 2014) telegeography.

Hong Kong

The Office of the Communications Authority (OFCA) published an invitation to participate in an auction of 2×49.2MHz of mobile spectrum in the 1900MHz-2200MHz (2100MHz) band, scheduled for December 2014. OFCA set out the minimum spectrum utilization fee (SUF), i.e. the reserve price for the spectrum auction, the auction rules and the key elements of the licensing framework. The unified carrier licenses will be valid for 15 years from October 22, 2016, i.e. following the expiry of the existing Hong Kong operators' 2×118.4MHz allocations in the 2100MHz band (previously issued under 3G UMTS licenses). By way of background, the Communications Authority (CA) decided in November 2013 that the then-four incumbent 2100MHz licensees – PCCW-HKT, CSL, Hutchison (3) and SmarTone – would be offered first refusal on two-thirds of their existing licensed block, while the remaining one-third, amounting to 2×39.2MHz, would be re-assigned through auction. Subsequently, in April 2014 the CA approved the acquisition of CSL by HKT on condition that the merging companies effectively divest 29.6MHz of spectrum in the 2100MHz band by not seeking the spectrum re-assignment, while also being barred from participating in the upcoming spectrum auction. All three incumbent licensees, HKT (including CSL), 3 and SmarTone, accepted the reassignment of the maximum combined 2×69.2MHz in August 2014, resulting in a total of 2×49.2MHz being available for re-assignment via the December auction. New entrants to the mobile market as well as the incumbent spectrum assignees (barring HKT) may participate in the auction. The 2100MHz spectrum on offer will be divided into five frequency bands, each with a bandwidth of 9.8MHz or 10.0MHz. An individual spectrum cap of 40MHz will be imposed, while the reserve price is set at HKD48 million (US$6.19 million) per MHz, with the final SUF payable to be determined during the auction. Network and service rollout obligations will be imposed only on new entrants to the spectrum band. China Mobile Hong Kong (currently without any 2100MHz frequencies) is widely expected to participate in the auction.

(September 22, 2014) telegeography.com

Hungary

Hungary sold mobile frequency blocks to four companies for 130.6 billion forint ($530 million), overshooting the government's revenue target and expanding the field of mobile phone service providers. Magyar Telekom Nyrt., the local unit of Deutsche Telekom AG, as well as the subsidiaries of Vodafone Group Plc. (VOD) and Telenor ASA (TEL), the three incumbent service providers won frequency blocks for 20-year periods, the media regulator known as NMHH said in a statement. Digi Kft., a local telecommunications service provider, also won frequency blocks, increasing the field of mobile phone service providers to four. Hungary invited bids for the country's unused mobile frequencies in May after the results of a previous tender were annulled by a local court citing "serious procedural law infringements." Hungary's government introduced a special tax and a utility levy on telecommunications companies as it seeks to keep the budget deficit within a European Union limit of 3 percent of output. The government originally targeted revenue of 104 billion forint from the frequency sale. Magyar Telekom's shares rose as much as 2.3 percent after the announcement and traded up 2 percent at 360 forint by noon in Budapest, leading a 0.6 percent gain in the benchmark BUX index. About 660,000 shares were traded or 42% of the three-month daily average. Magyar Telekom bought frequency blocks in the 800, 900, 1,800 and 2,600 MHZ bands for a total of 58.7 billion forint, the company said. Vodafone Hungary will pay 30.2 billion forint, Telenor 31.7 billion forint and Digi 10 billion forint for the awarded blocks. Fees are due within the next 10 days, according to NMHH. (September 29, 2014) bloomberg.com

India

Prime Minister has rejected plans to merge ailing state-owned telecos Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd (BSNL) and Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Ltd (MTNL). According to sources, the PM has asked the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) to consider purchasing BSNL's optical fiber cable (OFC) network, rather than infuse the struggling providers with fresh capital or merging the two units. Once under the control of the DoT, the PM argued, the OFC could be used to accelerate the rollout of the government's 'Digital India' program. (September 15, 2014) The Asian Age Delhi

The telecom regulator has asked the Department of Telecom to speed up its decision on whether or not to allow transfer of mobile subscribers from Loop to Airtel's network in Mumbai. TRAI has said that since Loop's license is set to expire in November, DoT must take a view on the deal in the interest of consumers. In June, TRAI had written to the DoT saying that the transfer of subscribers should be allowed only through the mobile number portability route after Airtel had announced that it would acquire Loop Mobile's three million subscribers in Mumbai along with its infrastructure, 400 towers. According to the regulator, subscribers' consent has to be taken before they can be switched to another operator's network. However, the DoT's initial view was in favor of allowing the deal on grounds that there was no bar on a slump sale under the existing license conditions. But no final decision was taken due to the opposition by TRAI. The matter was referred to the legal advisor who opined that the deal between Airtel and Loop can go ahead if there is no ban on a slump sale in the telecom license conditions. The problem is that the legal advisor did not give a clear cut view and left it to the DoT to interpret the license conditions. Loop Mobile's 20-year license expires in November and the company was unable to win back spectrum to continue services. Airtel, on the other hand, won spectrum in Mumbai in the last auction round. The slump-sale deal with Airtel, therefore, came as a relief for Loop subscribers, who were assured of service continuity. Countering TRAI's observation, Loop said that the deal in fact saved the subscribers from going through the MNP process. Loop argued that a similar transaction had been allowed when Norway's Telenor shifted assets and subscribers from its earlier joint venture with Unitech to a new company. (September 10, 2014) thehindubusinessline.com

India's government is considering replacing the Telecoms Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) with a new 'super regulator,' the Communications Commission, to oversee the communications sector. A new Communications Bill would remove older legislation, including the Telegraph Act and TRAI Act, and would do away with the Telecom Disputes Settlement and Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT). The new watchdog would consist of six members – each with a five-year tenure –including a chairman and members representing telecommunications, broadcasting, finance, management, accountancy and either law or consumer affairs. Meanwhile, the TDSAT would be replaced by the Communications Appellate Tribunal which will have the power to oversee the resolution of disputes and will be made up of three members. In terms of jurisdiction, the Commission would retain the functions of the TRAI, with powers to deal with matters currently handled by other authorities, including the Censor Board, the Competition Commission of India (CCI), the Ministry of Environment and the Department of Telecommunications (DoT). The bill is currently being finalized and could be introduced to parliament as soon as the winter session.
(September 3, 2014) CNBC TV-18

State-backed telcos Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd (BSNL) and Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Ltd (MTNL) are set to be merged by July 2015. In a presentation to Prime Minister, the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) said it plans to secure cabinet approval for the merger by June 30, 2015. To that end, the DoT is looking to finalize talks with the unions of BSNL and MTNL by March 2015. The regulator has also set deadlines for concluding organizational restructuring initiatives at both operators, including the hiving off of BSNL's tower assets to form a new tower company and the monetization of both operators' property holdings by December 31, 2014.
(September 3, 2014) The Economic Times

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) released a pre-consultation paper on virtual network operators (VNOs), which offer services by tying up with existing operators without buying spectrum. The Department of Telecom (DoT) had sought TRAI's recommendations for delinking of licenses for networks from delivery of services by way of VNOs including associated issues of definition of adjusted gross revenue under the unified licensing (UL) regime. The sectoral regulator said the draft National Telecom Policy-2011 issued by DoT envisaged two categories of licenses which are network service operator (NSO) license and service delivery operator (SDO) license. NSOs would be licensed to set up and maintain converged networks capable of delivering various types of services whereas SDOs would be licensed to deliver the services without having to set up the networks. VNOs are SDO licensees, who do not own the underlying networks but rely on the network and support of the infrastructure providers, telecommunications operators (who are owners of towers, radio access networks, spectrum, etc.) for providing telecom services to customers. In its pre-consultation paper, the regulator said in the proposed licensing framework, based on the VNO model, one issue could be whether the existing telecom service providers (TSPs) will have to obtain an NSO license or both NSO and SDO licenses on migration to the new licensing regime. A linked issue for deliberation will be about the necessity of changing the licensing regime at all, at such a short interval since UL was introduced, TRAI added. It said that In India, the TSPs have infrastructure, including spectrum, which is just about sufficient to cater to their own requirements. Would they really be able to spare their infrastructure for new SDOs? The regulator has also sought comments from stakeholders on other issues like the nature of agreement between two licensees, sharing of infrastructure, allotment of numbering resources, spectrum usage charges and lawful interception. (September 3, 2014) profit.ndtv.com

Italy

The Italian government is considering the introduction of tax breaks of up to 30% for companies looking to deploy broadband internet infrastructure in unserved and under-served areas of the country. Prime Minister's 'Unblock Italy' project will look to kick-start network rollouts in so-called 'digital divide' regions which have so far been avoided by fixed telcos when installing high speed equipment. A recent report from the European Commission (EC) placed Italy last in a ranking of European Union (EU) member states by penetration of 30Mbps and above fixed internet services. Just 18.4% of broadband lines in Italy offer speeds of 10Mbps or over, compared to an EU average of 66%. Growth in the Italian fixed broadband market has slowed almost to a standstill, with 13.95 million subscribers at the end of March 2014, up just 0.4% from three months earlier. (September 2, 2014) Telecompaper

Japan

The Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC) has disclosed that from October 1, 2014 mobile network portability (MNP) services will be available to Personal Handyphone System (PHS) subscribers of Willcom (now part of Ymobile Corp). The decision will benefit customers who want to subscribe to 3G/4G services provided by the country's cellcos but want to preserve their PHS number. Meanwhile, cellco Ymobile (formerly eMobile), which was formed via the merger between eAccess and Willcom in June 2014, has announced that it started providing missed call information and SMS functionality to PHS users from September 25. (September 30, 2014) telegeography.com

Macau

The government launched a public tender for 4G LTE mobile network operating licenses on 15 September 2014, offering four concessions with eight-year durations which become valid early next year. Potential bidders can submit questions on the tender by October 6 to the Bureau of Telecommunications Regulation (Direccao dos Servicos de Regulacao de Telecomunicacoes, DSRT), which will respond by October 17. Proposals for license bids must be submitted to the DSRT by November 18, and the regulator will open them the following day, according to the announcement. License winners will be expected to launch 4G LTE (FDD and/or TDD) mobile broadband services covering 50% of Macau territory by the end of 2015, rising to 100% in 2016. The director of the DSRT said that although there are currently four 3G mobile operators in Macau (CTM, 3, SmarTone and China Telecom), the auction of four licenses is not designed to be restricted to the existing players. The report adds that so far only CTM has confirmed its interest in bidding for a 4G license, while 3 Macau and China Telecom told the Business Daily that they are still reviewing the terms and requirements of the auction before making a decision on whether to bid. SmarTone has not publicly expressed an interest yet. (September 17, 2014) Macau Business Daily

Mexico

Mexican telecom watchdog IFT decided not to challenge sections of the secondary telecom legislation which, some civil servants claim, limit its authority. Adriana Labardini, one of IFT's seven commissioners, wrote that the regulator would not file, with the Supreme Court, an appeal against 41 articles in the legislation. Labardini and fellow commissioner María Elena Estavillo voted in favor of filing the challenge to the laws that took effect on August 13. The IFT's five other commissioners voted against doing so. Those in favor argue the new laws reduce IFT's autonomy and regulatory powers. Labardini said in a radio interview the new laws strip IFT of its ability to issue sanctions against broadcasters that do not comply with content guidelines. Other rules dilute the regulator's powers in negotiations with other ministries in matters such as geo-orbital positions, Labardini said. IFT will also be limited in its ability to participate in the legislative process in telecom matters and to authorize certain acquisitions such as Grupo Televisa's 100% purchase of cable provider Cablecom last month, she added. "Sadly, [the IFT] did not support the proposal and voted against the constitutional challenge before the Supreme Court," Labardini tweeted. The new telecom laws have prompted other legal challenges, as well. Last month, federal transparency authority IFAI declined to challenge sections of the legislation allowing government agencies to monitor mobile phone-user data. The sections allow security authorities, when carrying out criminal investigations, to request subscriber data from telcos. Court orders to obtain the data are not required. Former Mexico City mayor Marcelo Ebrard and hundreds of citizens have also filed injunctions against the same provisions, arguing the wording is too vague and that they violate the right to privacy and personal data protection. (September 4, 2014) bnamericas.com

Myanmar

The state-backed incumbent Myanmar Post and Telecommunications (MPT) has temporarily stopped selling its MMK1,500 (US$1.51) SIM cards. MPT sold 700,000 SIMs in the first ten days of September, but only around 480,000 of these are understood to be in use, whilst the remainders are expected to be sold on the black market, after high demand saw many vendors run out of their supply of the cards. An unnamed official from MPT's economic department was quoted as saying: 'We have stopped the sales of MMK1,500 SIM cards for the moment because we are concerned about black marketeers who will sell the SIM cards for a good price. We urge people not to buy their SIM cards. We will sell the SIM cards later to meet market demand.'
(September 15, 2014) Eleven Myanmar

Norway

The Norwegian Post and Telecommunications Authority (NPT) has announced that a 2×20MHz block of 900MHz spectrum will become available from January 1, 2018, with these frequencies expected to be freed up as a result of both Telenor and NetCom's licenses for them expiring. As such, the regulator has said it has begun preparatory work to establish the framework for awarding the spectrum, saying it is keen to assign the frequencies before the existing concessions expire. To that end, the NPT is seeking comments from interested parties on the matter, and will conduct meetings in Lillesand later this year to discuss its plans. (September 26, 2014) telegeography.com

The Norwegian Post and Telecommunications Authority (NPT) is seeking views from interested parties on whether or not numbers normally used for mobile services could also be utilized for other services. In outlining its plans to consult on the matter, the NPT noted that the debate had been prompted by requests from companies seeking to use mobile numbers for services such as mobile-centric voice-over-IP (VoIP). However, the watchdog said that it had previously been reluctant to allocate mobile numbers to such services due to a lack of regulatory clarity. With the NPT saying it has already done some preliminary assessments relating to the allocation and use of mobile numbers for new services, it has invited comments from interested stakeholders; a deadline of October 20, 2014 has been set for submissions. (September 23, 2014) telegeography.com

The Norwegian Post and Telecommunications Authority (NPT) has outlined plans under which all operators designated as holding significant market power (SMP) in the mobile market will be required to reduced mobile termination rates (MTRs) to a maximum of NOK0.083 (US$0.013) per minute from April 1, 2015. Looking ahead, the regulator has also confirmed that the rates will be further reduced from January 1, 2016 – to a maximum of NOK0.075 – before falling further – to NOK0.065 – from January 1, 2017. The NPT said it had reached its decision having conducted an updated market analysis of the sector, while it said it had also developed an updated version of the Long Run Incremental Cost (LRIC) model used for calculating the costs of termination. A national consultation on the proposals will now be undertaken, with submissions due by October 9, 2014, following which the regulator will review comments and publish an updated draft decision to the EFTA Surveillance Authority (ESA) for consideration. Following feedback from the EFTA, the NPT expects to finalize the ruling in the first quarter of 2015. (September 12, 2014) telegeography.com

The Norwegian Post & Telecoms Authority (NPT) has announced that it is postponing plans to notify the EFTA Surveillance Agency (ESA) of proposed regulation for the market for access and call origination on public mobile telephone networks (Market 15). With the proposed acquisition of Tele2 Norge by TeliaSonera's having already prompted the regulator to delay a planned auction of 1800MHz spectrum which was due in January 2015, it has again cited the deal as the reason for its decision to hold off on sending its Market 15 proposals, having originally planned to do so in the second half of 2014. A national consultation on proposed new regulation for the market in question had been conducted between January 16 and March 10 this year, following which the NPT revealed that Telenor Norge would be designated as holding significant market power (SMP) in Market 15 and as result would have obligations imposed on it. Now, the watchdog has suggested that it may need to conduct another national consultation, depending on the assessment of the TeliaSonera/Tele2 merger by the Norwegian Competition Authority. A timetable for further work on the regulator's Market 15 proposals is now expected to be disclosed at a later date. (September 3, 2014) telegeography.com

The Norwegian Post and Telecommunications Authority (NPT) has decided to postpone the 1800 MHz auction. The auction had been scheduled for January 2015. The frequencies available in the auction are the unsold blocks from the multiband auction in December 2013. After identifying demand for the available resources NPT consulted the market on the framework for the assignment process. On the basis of an overall assessment of the consultation responses NPT decided to assign the frequencies through a multi round ascending auction. However, this summer TeliaSonera released news about the planned acquisition of Tele2 Norway. This acquisition requires approval by the competition authority and furthermore the Ministry of Transport and Communications might have to assess the transfer of Tele2's existing spectrum holdings. These possible changes in the market situation might impact several of the potential bidders in the auction. NPT considers it to be important that these conditions are clarified before the next auction and the auction is therefore postponed. The NPT added that it will publish a new timeline for the auction at a later date. (September 1, 2014) cellular-news.com

Peru

Peru has delayed the switchover to digital terrestrial television (DTT) by five years. The transfer from analogue to digital was set to start in Q2 2014, Q3 2015 and Q4 2018 for regions one, two and three of Peru, including the cities of Lima and Callao. The official stressed that the deadline for the deactivation of analogue signals remains unchanged at 2020, 2022 and 2024. When the initial launch dates were set out in 2010, the minister explained, it was assumed that the market would have developed to the stage that digital receivers would be sufficiently widespread to support the switchover. However, the number of potential recipients is currently insufficient to make the switch to digital profitable. (September 11, 2014) TeleSemana

SAMENA

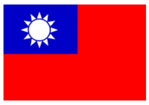
The South Asia, Middle East, North Africa region's SAMENA Telecommunications Council joined stakeholders across the global Internet ecosystem to discuss opportunities, exchange best practices and help shape the evolution and use of the Internet at the 9th Internet Governance Forum (IGF), which took place from September 2 - 5 in Istanbul, Turkey. Held under the theme "Connecting Continents for Enhanced Multi-stakeholder Internet Governance", IGF 2014 provided an opportunity for SAMENA to contribute its unique perspectives, insights and regional experiences to discussions during the Forum's different sessions and workshops. Commenting on the Council's participation at IGF 2014, George Salama, Sr. Manager - Public Policy, SAMENA Telecommunications Council, said, "It is very promising to see such spirit of cooperation in the IGF among the different stakeholders - governments, industry, civil society, academia - all united around a common vision to ensure a better future for the Internet and its governance. A future that is based on mutual collaboration, transparency, and respect for the needs of the industry as well as of the end user." "The IGF, provides an open environment for discussions around strategic Internet public policy topics that are shaping the sustainability of the ICT industry. With its decentralized structure and multi-stakeholder character, the Forum allows a cross-section of voices to contribute to the development of policies while identifying and addressing emerging issues," he added. The IGF is a multi-stakeholder, democratic and transparent forum which facilitates discussions on public policy issues related to key elements of Internet governance. IGF provides an enabling platform for discussions among all stakeholders in the Internet governance ecosystem, including all entities accredited by the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), as well as other institutions and individuals with proven expertise and experience in all matters related to Internet governance. This year's IGF focused particularly on Net Neutrality - an issue that had been left open following the NET mundial meeting in Sao Paulo in April 2014. Other prominent topics which dominated the debate at IGF 2014 included "Critical Internet Resources", "Content Creation", "Policies Enabling Access", "Enhancing Digital Trust", and "Internet and Human Rights", among others. (September 8, 2014) samenacouncil.org

South Africa

South African telecoms regulatorICASA has revealed the final mobile termination rates (MTRs) for the period October 1, 2014 to September 30, 2017. The watchdog's final decision will give smaller players 'slightly better asymmetry' than the one proposed in its draft regulation from early September. For mobile calls, the rate will remain set at ZAR0.20 per minute (US$0.02) until September 30, 2015, while fixed termination rates (FTRs) will drop to ZAR0.12 per minute for calls in the same number area, and ZAR0.15 for long-distance calls. From October 2015 onwards, MTRs will drop to ZAR0.16, while FTRs will decrease to ZAR0.11 for calls within the same area and ZAR0.12 for long-distance calls. October 2016 will see the MTR tariffs drop to ZAR0.13, while FTRs for all area codes will decrease to ZAR0.10. The final legislation also offers better asymmetry for smaller players such as Cell C and Telkom Mobile – from October 1, 2014 the asymmetry MTR rate is set at ZAR0.31 per minute, before dropping to ZAR0.24 per minute (38%) in October 2015. A further reduction, to ZAR0.19, will occur in 2016. Previously, ICASA proposed to cut the asymmetry MTR rate to ZAR0.30 from October 1, 2014, ZAR0.22 per minute (March 2015), ZAR0.16 (2016) and ZAR0.10 (2017). Earlier this month ICASA reviewed its proposed MTRs for the period October 2014 to end-February 2018, following a Gauteng court ruling that the previous regulations were 'unlawful and invalid'. Along with dramatically reducing the level of asymmetry for smaller players, the regulator also suggested a new way of determining whether an operator may qualify for asymmetry – a company must have less than 20% of the share of total terminated minutes in either the fixed or mobile market in order to be considered for symmetry. Shortly after, ICASA was accused by Call C of making 'a dramatic U-turn', with the cellco stating: 'the massive proposed reduction in asymmetry completely eliminates any pro-competitive remedy...ICASA is now only proposing a marginal cost recovery, which is not, in terms of many international benchmarks and literature, the basis on which asymmetry is determined, and which will have the effect of entrenching the duopoly in the South African market today.' (September 30, 2014) TechCentral

Telecoms and postal services Minister, has announced that a final policy on high-demand frequency spectrum for mobile broadband services, including Long Term Evolution (LTE), will be published within the next six months. Minister revealed that the Department of Telecommunications and Postal Services (formerly Department of Communications) is currently working with telecoms regulator ICASA on finalizing the position, and that the policy will be ready before the end of the financial year (March 31, 2015). Telecoms regulator ICASA announced a scheme to reallocate a 50MHz block of 2.6GHz spectrum belonging to state-backed broadcasting firm Sentech to the country's mobile operators, with all spare bandwidth in the spectrum band to be offered along with 800MHz 'digital dividend' spectrum at an auction to be held in 2014; the digital dividend band will be freed up following South Africa's switch-over from analogue to digital television. However, the migration process has been postponed on several occasions since 2008; previously, Minister pledged to publish government's final policy on digital migration by the end of July 2014, but the regulator failed to meet his self-imposed deadline. (September 3, 2014) TechCentral

Taiwan



Taiwan will reportedly launch a second 4G spectrum auction in the third quarter of 2015, according to comments made by National Communications Commission (NCC) chairperson Shih Shih-hao. With six operators expected to vie for frequencies in the sale process, it has been suggested that the auction could generate more than TWD15 billion (US$494 million) for state coffers. A total of 190MHz of LTE-suitable spectrum is expected to be released for sale, including 50MHz for Time Division Duplex LTE (TDD-LTE) and 140MHz for Frequency Division Duplex (FDD-LTE) technology. Taiwan's 4G spectrum sale which concluded in October 2013 saw the total value of the combined bids reach TWD118.65 billion, well above the floor price of approximately TWD35.9 billion. In that auction Chunghwa Telecom acquired the largest batch of frequencies, having paid TWD39.08 billion for three frequency blocks totaling 35MHz of bandwidth, while Far EasTone bagged 30MHz of bandwidth with bids totaling TWD31.32 billion. Taiwan Mobile Company acquired a total of 30MHz of new spectrum for TWD29.01 billion, while new players Ambit Microsystems Corp, backed by Hon Hai Group, and Star of Taiwan, a subsidiary backed by Ting Hsin International Group, claimed 20MHz and 10MHz of the available spectrum for TWD9.18 billion and TWD3.655 billion, respectively. Rounding out the winners, Asia Pacific Telecom paid TWD6.415 billion for a 10MHz block of LTE-suitable spectrum.
(September 29, 2014) Want China Times

National Communications Commission (NCC) has decided to assign 5700-6400MHz as an unlicensed frequency band for 4G mobile communication operators to deploy outdoor Small Cell base stations to enhance backhaul networks. The use of 5700-6400MHz band is free and based on application by 4G operators, NCC said. NCC is also drafting up a testing standard regulation on handset information security and expects to propose a draft version in mid-2015 and a final version by the end of that year, NCC indicated. (September 25, 2014) digitimes.com

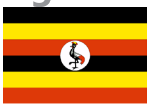
The National Communications Commission (NCC) has reportedly made a draft plan related to the release of frequency band units for Time Division LTE (TD-LTE) and Frequency Division LTE (FD-LTE) mobile communication operation. Citing the watchdog's Chairman Howard Shyr, it has been claimed that the NCC aims to release a total of 50MHz of 2600MHz band spectrum for TD-LTE operation in either the second or third quarter of 2015, while a further 140MHz of frequencies in that same band designated for FD-LTE will be offered up in the last quarter of the year. In addition, there are plans to release 100MHz in the 2300MHz band, as well as frequencies in the 1900MHz and 3600MHz bands, for TD-LTE operation sometime after 2015. With regards to the final assignment of band units for both TD-LTE and FD-LTE, Mr. Shyr noted that this will depend on actual market demand. (September 17, 2014) Digitimes

Trinidad & Tobago

The Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad & Tobago (TATT) has announced that mobile number portability (MNP) will be launched commercially on February 26, 2015 with the introduction of mobile-to-mobile number porting, while fixed-to-mobile number porting will be available from May 1, 2015. TATT published a policy document on the issue in September 2012 with a follow-up consultation with operators beginning January 2013; operators obliged to offer number portability are Telecommunications Services of Trinidad & Tobago (TSTT), Digicel T&T, Columbus Communications, Lisa Communications, Open Telecom and Three Sixty Communications. TATT's announcement said: 'The authority required that each said operator conduct an assessment of its state of readiness so as to deduce the most appropriate date of commencement for the implementation of mobile to mobile number portability and fixed to mobile number portability,' adding that the notice on the MNP launch date represents a 'determination that is binding upon all operators so required by the authority to implement number portability.' The determination was signed by TATT chairman Selby Wilson on July 31, 2014 but was posted on the regulator's website on August 28.

(September 2, 2014) Daily Guardian

Uganda



The government is facing a lawsuit from a local IT firm over its plans to siphon off half of the country's ICT fund and rechannel it into a consolidated government investment fund. All companies licensed under the Uganda Communications Act must pay 2% of their annual revenues into the specialized ICT fund, with the proceeds used to promote the development of the country's communications sector. The government now wants to take half of the ICT fund and place it in a consolidated fund for wider infrastructure projects. The IT services and online marketing company Host Net Uganda has petitioned the Constitutional Court to stop the move, saying it is unconstitutional as it was not included as part of the government's 2014/15 budget. The industry regulator, the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC), has already spoken out against the government's plans. Meanwhile, Ministry of Finance spokesperson said the law gives them powers to manage all government revenues and 'the ministry is being courteous to say that they can use the 50%.' (September 3, 2014) The Observer

Ukraine

The National Commission for the State Regulation of Communications and Informatization has approved a draft Cabinet decree which ostensibly bans operators with more than 50% Russian ownership from bidding in the upcoming planned 3G UMTS mobile license tender. Three licenses are expected to be on offer – potentially enabling all the main GSM operators –MTS Ukraine, Kyivstar and Astelit (life:) – to join Ukrtelecom (TriMob) in the UMTS network operating segment, while the possibility of a CDMA-based mobile operator such as Intertelecom competing for a license has also been mooted. However, the newly approved draft resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers reportedly excludes MTS Ukraine, which is a 100% subsidiary of Russia's Mobile TeleSystems (MTS), although there was no mention in the report of the possibility of banning Kyivstar, part of Vimpelcom Ltd – which although headquartered in the Netherlands and listed in New York, remains majority controlled by Russian shareholders.

(September 11, 2014) Ukrainian News

United Kingdom

Proposals by the UK government which called on the country's mobile network operators to share networks for 'national roaming' are said to have been rejected by cellcos. It was noted that Mr. Sajid Javid, the British culture secretary, had made these plans an important part of attempt to improve mobile coverage in rural areas ahead of the general election due to be held next year. As per the government's proposals it had suggested that mobile customers be able to connect to infrastructure belonging to any operator in those areas where their own carrier has no coverage. It is understood that digital economy minister Ed Vaizey had written to cellcos with a view to having a national roaming agreements in place by the start of 2015, only for telecoms executives to claim the plans were unworkable in the timeframe set out, while also noting that they were undesirable in principle. One unnamed source familiar with the discussions between the state and operators was cited as saying of the plan: 'It was rejected. There are reasons why it would not work from a technical and legal perspective ... The letters outlined the complexity of it and pushed for alternatives.' In the wake of the development Mr. Vaizey is said to have called on the UK's four cellcos – EE, O2 UK, Vodafone UK and Hutchison 3G UK – to put forward any other ideas they might have for enhancing coverage in rural areas. Meanwhile, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) is said to be engaging in its own cost and benefit analysis of national roaming.

(September 8, 2014) The Financial Times

United States

The top U.S. watchdog in Afghanistan wants answers on why the U.S. spent $6.5 million on six communication towers that aren't being used and have so far led to one fatality. According to a letter from John F. Sopko, special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction, the State Department pressed ahead with the towers despite doubts about their usefulness to the Afghans and opposition from the Pentagon. "Concerns were raised that Afghan telecom providers would not connect to the system, and that [the Department of Defense] did not want the towers because of the high cost of fueling the towers' generators," said the letter, which was sent to Secretary of State John F. Kerry. "Despite these concerns, the State Department moved forward with construction," Mr. Sopko said. One international security force soldier was killed when a helicopter hit one of the towers during nighttime operations, prompting investigators to demand answers about how the towers are being outfitted for air-traffic safety — such as equipping them with the small blinking lights that are ubiquitous on towers across America. State Department documents show that the purpose of the towers was "to expand and enhance media-provider coverage and telecommunication services to the civilian Afghan population in underserved and strategically important provinces via television, radio and telephonic mediums." The towers were labeled one of the agency's "highest strategic communications priorities," but phone companies and cell-tower operators received repeated threats from the Taliban. In a response to an inquiry earlier this year, the State Department said that giving the towers to the Afghan government was considered, but ultimately rejected as the nation continues "to struggle with lacking resources and technical capacity to operate and maintain these towers." The agency's letter continues that "after it became clear that the towers could not be used for their originally intended purpose, the Department considered alternatives but determined that there was no available foreign assistance or other State Department use for the towers." Now Mr. Sopko wants answers as to why the towers were built seemingly without an ultimate purpose in mind, and has asked the State Department to turn over more documents related to the planning and construction.

(September 17, 2014) washingtontimes.com

U.S. network gear makers are bracing for slower revenue growth in the second half of the year as telecom operators, their main customers, postpone spending until the dust settles on several big mergers. Telecom giants AT&T Inc and Sprint Corp are taking time to decide whether to upgrade existing wired networks or roll out 4G networks, forcing gear makers to cut expectations for what is usually the stronger half of their year. Ciena Corp and Finisar Corp last week joined their peers in forecasting a weak current quarter, citing delays on closing sales to customers in North America. Analysts say a slowdown could last two or three quarters. AT&T is set to buy DirecTV for $48.5 billion and Deutsche Telekom AG is seeking buyers for T-Mobile US Inc after the collapse of a sale to Sprint - which itself was bought last year by Japan's Softbank Corp. "When deals get done, when operators come together, typically the vendors experience a pause," said Simon Leopold, analyst at Raymond James. Most affected by the slowdown in orders will be those network gear makers with the greatest exposure to the telecoms business, such as Ciena, Juniper Networks Inc and JDS Uniphase Corp. Others, including F5 Networks Inc, have been spared the brunt of the slowdown in telecom spending as they get a large chunk of their revenue from enterprise customers, who are still spending to upgrade networks and guarding data from hackers. Shares of F5 Networks and Aruba Networks Inc, another company with greater exposure to enterprise customers, rose 11 percent and 21 percent respectively between the end of June and Friday's close. In contrast, shares of Juniper, Ciena and JDS Uniphase have fallen between 5 percent and 11 percent in the same period. At least 11 brokerages cut their price target on Juniper's stock after the company reported results in July, while at least 10 raised their target on F5 Networks after the company reported. Mergers between U.S. telecom companies were affecting spending decisions, which in turn could delay some of Ciena's projects, Chief Executive Gary Smith said on a post-earnings conference call last Thursday. U.S. network gear makers have grown accustomed to strong results in the final two quarters of the calendar year, riding high on a decade-long trend among telecom operators of spending big in the second half. The reverse will be true this year. Evercore Partners analyst Mark McKechnie said telecom operators would spend about 45 percent of their budget in the second half versus 55 percent in a typical year. "The investor position is relatively cautious for the next couple of quarters," said UBS Equities analyst Amitabh Passi.

(September 8, 2014) reuters.com

Venezuela

Telecoms regulator CONATEL has announced in a statement on its website that four companies have been pre-qualified to receive 4G mobile licenses in the 1700MHz/2100MHz (AWS) and/or 2500MHz-2690MHz frequency bands, namely Movilnet and Telefonica Venezuela plus two would-be new entrants to the mobile sector, long-distance telephony provider Multiphone Venezuela and Galaxy Entertainment Venezuela. Specifically, only Movilnet and Movistar are in the running for AWS spectrum licenses (blocks 'G-G' and 'H-H') while Movistar, Multiphone and Galaxy (DirecTV) are pre-qualified for the 2500MHz-2690MHz frequencies (B-B, C-C and D-D blocks). The regulator added that the final selection and awards of the spectrum allocations would be made 'in ten working days' from the pre-qualification announcement, after the Committee on Public Offering (a committee selected by CONATEL to monitor the granting of frequencies), completes its technical analysis of the tenders received. Under license conditions, frequency winners must then roll out 4G mobile services to at least the 20 most populous municipalities in Venezuela in the first year of operation; whilst within four years the 4G services must cover all state capitals; and by the end of the fifth year, 100 or more municipalities (representing over three-quarters of the population) must be covered. The sole 4G LTE mobile operator in Venezuela is currently Digitel, controlled by Venezuelan media and telecoms tycoon Oswaldo Cisneros, while it is notable that the parent of one of the pre-qualified 4G bidders, DirecTV, is currently the subject of a takeover bid by US giant AT&T.

(September 29, 2014) telegeography.com

Zimbabwe

The government is proposing the introduction of new taxes on the telecoms industry, including further levies on airtime, data usage and mobile handset costs. Minister of Finance and Economic Development, in his 2014 Mid-term Fiscal Policy Review Statement, noted: 'Government faces a challenge to raise additional revenue to finance non-discretionary expenditures. I therefore propose to levy excise duty of 5% on airtime for voice and data, with effect from September 15, 2014.' He went on to say that an earlier reduction of taxation on the purchase of new cellular handsets, which was implemented in August 2009, had had the desired effect of stimulating growth in the cellular market, and he would therefore be upping the tax rate on device sales to 25% from mid-September. (September 15, 2014) BiztechAfrica

Javaid Akhtar Malik
Regulatory Affairs
SAMENA Telecommunications Council

Bilel Jamoussi
ITU Candidate

INTERVIEW

A distinguished engineer and respected manager; multilingual standardization expert and holder of 22 patents, Tunisian born who has been Chief of the Study Groups Department of ITU secretariat's Standardization Bureau (TSB) in Geneva Switzerland since 2010.

Prior to 2010, he worked in the private sector for 15 years in the USA and Canada. As Director of Standards, he managed more than 50 staff and the company participation in more than 90 standards organizations.

In the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), he authored a number of Internet standards. As an IEEE Senior Member, he was elected to the IEEE Standards Association (IEEE-SA) Board of Governors and the IEEE-SA Corporate Advisory Group.

He holds a BSc, MSc and PhD in Computer Engineering from the Pennsylvania State University, USA.

He is fluent in Arabic, French, and English and speaks some Spanish and German.

Q. Why are you running for the post of TSB Director?

A. The ITU has been evolving and adapting to serve the needs of the world in terms of consensus building and international agreements on Telecommunication and ICTs over the past 150 years.

Today, the ITU is going through a critical and challenging phase in its evolution. The standardization sector in particular is being challenged for relevance and scope.

To succeed in meeting these challenges, the next TSB Director must have a clear understanding of a complex interplay among various variables including the needs of developed vs. developing countries, the needs of the diverse membership categories of governments, regulators, private sector, and academia; the issues of intellectual property rights and standards; technical and commercial considerations; the collaboration of ITU-T with other standards development organizations; the intersection of ICTs with vertical sectors; proven leadership and management skills; and a proven record of reaching consensus among the diverse views of membership.

I believe that my five years in TSB as chief of the study groups department responsible for all the ten study groups in ITU-T spanning various technical and regulatory topics, my achievements in reaching consensus on various controversial topics, and the fifteen years in the private sector before joining TSB have equipped me to effectively meet these challenges from the first day as the elected TSB Director.

Q. What are your key achievements over the past five years as Chief of the ITU-T Study Groups Department in TSB?

A. When I took office in 2010, I was faced with a challenge of recruiting five new staff members to TSB to replace the retiring study group counselors. The feedback of Study Group chairmen and of delegates has been excellent over the quality of the new staff and the continuity in providing the best service to membership during this transition.

The second challenge was to prepare for and support for the yearly Chief Technology Officer (CTO) meetings, the Global Standards Symposium (GSS-12), the World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly (WTSA-12), and the World Conference on International Telecommunications (WCIT-12).

The CTO meetings in 2012 and 2013 have helped ITU-T in focusing on the issues of highest importance to the private sector such as the Standards Landscape, Transport standards in support of 4G, Big Data, Machine to Machine (M2M) communication, and Software Defined Networking (SDN).

GSS-12 identified the importance of standards addressing the intersection of ICTs with the vertical sectors such as healthcare, utilities, and banking and the need for a new collaboration paradigm with these verticals. The report of GSS-12 helped WTSA-12 agree on a number of key resolutions including the creation of the Review Committee and a new resolution on eHealth.

The third challenge was to implement the WTSA-12 Resolutions. I had the privilege to 1) serve as the Senior Counselor for the Review Committee; 2) forge a new collaborative relationship with Continua Health Alliance leading to the publication of a fundamental Recommendation on eHealth (ITU-T H.810); 3) help members initiate new topics and groups such as the Focus Group on Digital Financial Services and the Focus Group on Aviation Applications of Cloud Computing for Flight Data Monitoring; and 4) creating an environment of collocation between the 700 delegates of IEEE 802 on Ethernet standards and the 400 delegates of study group 15 (SG15) on transport, access, and home networking standards by hosting the meeting of IEEE 802 back-to-back with SG15 in Geneva.

Finally, several working methods had to be improved and modernized. I led the project of automatic contribution posting on the ITU-T Study Group web page providing membership with instant availability of their contribution on the ITU-T web site; the project of the improved working methods of mailing lists; and the project of modernizing the international numbering recourses by providing access to membership through a modern database system.

Q. What is your vision for the future of ITU-T as TSB Director?

A. Make ITU-T the most attractive and responsive international standards development organization for the ICT sector with a focus on relevance, quality, and speed.

Accelerate the journey towards bridging the standardization gap between developed and developing countries in close collaboration with ITU-D

Strengthen cooperation with other relevant organizations with a focus on the intersection of ICT with the vertical sectors (healthcare, banking, transportation, utilities, etc.)

Enhance the transfer of innovation to standards and the participation of Academia in ITU-T.

Q. Why do you think you will win this election?

A. 1) A very strong CV and a demonstrated leadership to meet the challenging job of Director having been No. 2 in TSB for the past 5 years and having led a corporate standards strategy for 15 years before that;
2) A geographic balance in the team of elected officials being the only TSB candidate from an Arab and African Member State
3) Clear communication in three of the six official UN languages
4) Neutrality and diplomacy

WHOLESALE NEWS

WHOLESALE Updates

1bn minutes through Nigerian interconnect exchange carriers

World Telecom Labs (WTL) announced that more than 1 billion minutes have passed through its specialist 2nd generation VoIP switches deployed by five of Nigeria's interconnect exchange carriers.

Licensed by the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), the carriers - Breeze Micro, Exchange, ICN, Niconnx and Solid - were established to increase competition and transparency in the Nigerian telecom marketplace. The four leading mobile operators in Nigeria are now all required to divert 10% of their inter-carrier voice and SMS traffic to one of these operators. The five licensees started offering services at the end of last year initially acting as wholesale interconnect carriers for TDM voice traffic. They are using WTL's switches to transfer traffic between the four existing mobile networks. WTL is also helping the operators with their billing systems and the optimization of voice traffic to increase capacity and reduce costs.

Leigh Smith, MD of WTL, said "What a triumph for the NCC. The benefits of introducing the new carriers are clear: a huge amount of traffic is being taken off the infrastructure of the established carriers in Nigeria thereby freeing up capacity, increasing speeds and reducing latency. In addition, there is greater transparency and openness in the market."

EU expected to deregulate wholesale roaming fees

Caps on the amounts mobile network operators in Europe can charge one another for network access could be ditched next month, should new EU proposals be adopted.

According to reports from industry news sites, a move to deregulate wholesale roaming fees was approved by the EU's member states on Tuesday (23 September 2014) and is expected to be finalized in mid-October. This follows intense lobbying from the mobile phone industry, with the likes of Vodafone and EE having pressured the EU to reduce regulation in the European market. Olaf Swantee, the latter's Chief Executive, has claimed cuts to wholesale roaming fees cost the operator £42 million in the first half of 2014.

ETNO, a lobbying group that counts Deutsche Telekom, Orange and O2 owner Telefonica among its members, welcomed the proposals in a statement that argued the move was essential to help operators maintain profits amid pressure to compete with data-based services like Skype.

Inwi to offer ADSL despite-delayed wholesale access offers

Moroccan telecoms provider Inwi (Wana) has reportedly launched its long-awaited ADSL services, despite an ongoing issue with the sharing of incumbent Maroc Telecom's local loop, domestic news source La Vie Eco reports. According to unnamed sources, Inwi has contacted a number of clients to offer them a free trial subscription to the new ADSL service, at download speeds ranging from 10Mbps to 20Mbps. The operator will reportedly use Maroc Telecom's local loop, under the terms set out by the current technical and tariff wholesale offers, which have been referred for revision by telecoms regulator Agence Nationale de Reglementation de Telecom (ANRT).

UCC asks telecoms to remove roaming charges

UGANDA Communications Commission (UCC), the telecom regulator, is asking operators to renegotiate with their partners across Kenya and Rwanda to enable seamless implementation of the One Network Area directive, which removes roaming charges within the three states.

UCC chief Godfrey Mutabazi has explained that the three governments have instituted the termination rates in all countries to be $10 cents (about sh260) and telecoms are free to play around this figure. The new termination rates means that for instance, a telecom operator in Uganda routing its subscribers' calls to another operator in Kenya, the rates should not exceed sh260. "They can play in that range ($10 cents) and say make it 7 cents and make a profit of 3 cents," noted Mutabazi in a phone call, from the Netherlands.

The development is a result of a decision by the Northern Corridor member states of Uganda, Kenya and Rwanda and the South Sudan adapted at a regional telecommunications framework for the implementation of a "One Network Area". This was agreed during the 5th heads of state summit for the Northern Corridor integration projects held in Nairobi, Kenya on May 2, 2014.

Vodafone slams ACCC over call and text price regulation

Vodafone Hutchison Australia has accused the competition regulator of using "failed gambles" and spurious analysis in its regulation of mobile phone and text message prices.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission last month issued a discussion paper into its ¬regulation of Mobile Terminating Access Services (MTAS), which define how much the telcos pay each other for calls involving mobile phones and text messages. For instance if a Telstra user calls a Vodafone Australia customer, Telstra will charge its user and pay Vodafone for the services.

The ACCC says services are much cheaper overseas and wants to cut MTAS prices to help lower local fees – a move strongly backed by customer advocates like the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN).
Where Australian MTAS prices were 3.6¢ per minute in January 2014, it was 1.455¢ per minute in the United Kingdom and 0.681¢ per minute in China.

But Vodafone Australia slammed the ACCC and its discussion paper in a strongly worded submission to the review earlier this month.

TECHNOLOGY NEWS

Technology Updates

Viber Messaging App brings video calling to iOS, Android Apps

Viber, the cross-platform messaging application, updated its iOS and Android apps with a slew of new features. Most important, the company introduced a video-calling feature, bringing it more in line with the desktop version of the app. The new move makes Viber better equipped to challenge the Microsoft-backed Skype messenger. The introduction of video calling in Viber mobile apps helps users transfer calls between mobiles and desktops, the app's change-log on Play Store and iTunes reads. Now the service offers free communications via voice, text and video, no matter which platform. The app's cross-platform functionality enables exchanging video calls between Android and iOS, as well as PC users. Viber also made some individual improvements to Android and iOS apps. The Android version 5.0 brings a new design and support for new languages, including Bulgarian, Persian and Serbian. Viber 5.0 for iOS devices features improvements to forwarding photo and video messages with easy managing of sticker packs.

Vodacom SA trials VoLTE technology; HD Voice-over-3G currently in deployment

South African mobile operator Vodacom claims to have placed 'the first voice call over a 4G LTE. Vodacom CEO Andries Delport disclosed that the trial is the first step towards implementation of voice-over-LTE (VoLTE) technology, which would allow for faster call setup times, better voice quality and an overall improved level of service. The executive added: 'Typically reserved for data, the move to use 4G/LTE technology to carry voice traffic will in the future mean better call quality for consumers and a more efficient use of network resources ... The migration of voice traffic to the 4G/LTE network will also have the benefit of freeing up capacity currently used to carry voice services.'

Meanwhile, Vodacom has also announced that it is currently deploying high definition (HD) voice technology across its 3G network, following the commercial launch of the service by rival MTN SA in August 2014. As previously reported by CommsUpdate, MTN launched the technology on its 3G network using the Adaptive Multi-Rate Wideband (AMR-WB) coding standard, enabling high-quality voice calls and an improved user experience.

NTT DOCOMO to establish 5G development units

Japanese telecoms giant NTT DOCOMO has announced plans to set up two new business units – the Innovation Management Department and the 5G Laboratory – from 1 October 2014, to strengthen its innovation, research and development (R&D) in next generation mobile technologies. The new units are expected to provide a hothouse environment to drive DOCOMO's R&D activities, and to help with the international standardization of 5G.

According to TeleGeography's GlobalComms Database, DOCOMO reported a 3.4% decrease in operating revenues for the three months ended 30 June 2014 (Q1 FY2014/15), to JPY1.075 trillion, down from JPY1.114 trillion reported at end-June 2013. In operational terms, the carrier reported a total of 63.566 million subscribers at the same date, up 3.2% from 61.623 million at 30 June 2013. Further, the company reported that subscribers to its 3G services, marketed under the 'FOMA' brand, decreased by 16.7% y-o-y to 39.523 million users, while subscribers to its 4G LTE service, marketed under the brand name 'Xi', increased by nearly ten million to 24.043 million, compared to the 14.198 million reported twelve months previously.

Beachfront debuts mobile video ad platform

Beachfront Media has launched Beachfront.io, a video ad platform for mobile apps offering programmatic buys with both public real-time bidding (RTB) and access to private marketplace and inventory.

According to BI Intelligence, programmatic and RTB ad spend is growing fast: RTB will account for over $18.2 billion or 33% of US digital ad sales by 2018. The report shows that a majority of this growth is being fueled by mobile and video ads. "With the majority of digital media consumption now happening in apps, advertisers need the tools to reach this massive mobile audience in an effective, efficient manner," said Frank Sinton, CEO and founder of Beachfront Media. "With Beachfront.io , we are opening up mobile video advertising and making it completely programmatic - which gives advertisers access to a massive audience with the insights they need to optimize campaigns, in real time." Publishers can set up both public marketplaces via RTB and programmatic premium private marketplaces; advertisers can then bid on a wide range of in-app mobile inventory.

Karma's 4G LTE hotspot lets you pay as you go

Need a Wi-Fi hotspot that doesn't tie you into a long-term contract? The folks at Karma have a new device that uses 4G LTE.

Currently available for preorder, the new Karma Go normally runs for $149, but you can score it for $99 if you order within the next 29 days. Those of you who already own a Karma device can save further through an upgrade discount. The company promises that the new hotspot will ship in December. The new Karma Go hotspot taps into Sprint's 4G LTE network. Karma avoids the usual monthly fees and long-term contracts imposed by other Wi-Fi hotspot vendors. Instead, you pay only for the data you use at a rate starting at $14 upfront for 1GB. But that data never expires, so it carries over from month to month until you use it up. Karma promises that the more data you buy upfront, the more money you can save.

The Karma hotspot can handle up to eight devices at one time, so you can connect your laptop, phone, and tablet, and still have room for five more gadgets.

Ericsson broadens TV, Mediaroom platform with new solutions

Since the acquisition of Mediaroom in September 2013, Ericsson has accelerated efforts and investments to further extend its television and media leadership in the Pay TV space. As part of this effort, Ericsson, last week, announced a number of solutions that deliver new television experiences for consumers, while providing operators with the tools to increase revenue, build customer loyalty and drive new business.

Ericsson is introducing the latest release of the IPTV platform, Ericsson Mediaroom. The latest release elevates the TV viewing experience, delivering a host of new consumer-oriented capabilities that empower operators to deliver the highest quality live, video on demand (VOD) and time-shifted television experiences. New features include: making "Restart TV" a core experience; unified search functionality that offers consumers unparalleled levels of simplicity when discovering content; an enhanced user interface that maximizes full-screen viewing; and a new channel guide.

StarHub combines data of cable TV viewers and mobile users for targeted advertising.

StarHub can tell if a household watches National Geographic or sports channels, as well as the websites that its occupants visit on their StarHub mobile phones. These are all tracked.

The information is being fed into a big machine to churn out household profiles, now used to offer targeted marketing to companies that advertise on StarHub's cable TV platform. On Friday, StarHub announced the launch of Smart Targeting to help advertisers get better marketing results. For instance, consumers are clustered anonymously under categories like fashionista, tech optimist or sports enthusiast, she added. This is similar to how Web giants such as Google and Amazon market to their customers and website visitors.

A Snapshot of Digitization in Saudi Arabia

Eng. Mohammed Al Ageel
Chief Executive Officer
Bravo, Saudi Arabia

Lately, we have been witnessing the need to digitally transform our economies and focus on true utilization of our industry's broadband investments, to help bring about not only better investment returns for the investor, but to also help the nations in which such investments are made to become more socio-economically progressive.

The fundamental trigger to such a focus on digital transformation comes from the need to accelerate digitization, or the adoption of digital services and applications that simplify life and improve transparency in processes. Such realization has been brought forth to us through various means, and a digitization study conducted by SAMENA Council further adds urgency to the matter.

Overall, to our collective dismay, there is no country within our region which ranks in the top 25 countries where digital transformation has been realized to its truest potential. In fact, what we see is, most of the countries that have adopted accelerated digitization programs, and Saudi Arabia being one of them, still fall in the digitally "emerging" category. This means, a tremendous potential awaits us as industry; as policy-makers, investors, technology providers, and market players.

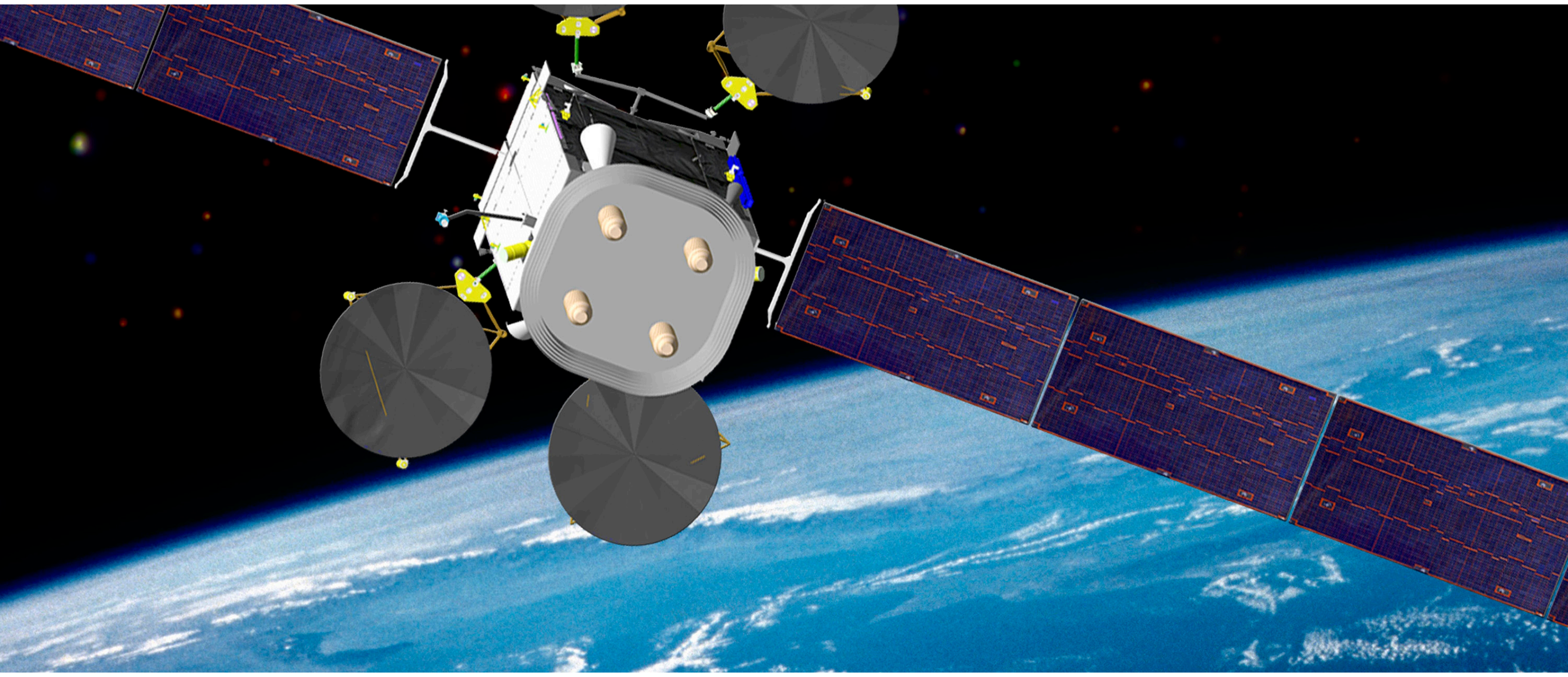
Fortunately, in Saudi Arabia, we have been able to set a priority on digitization, having realized that with proper investment to improve upon our national rate of digital service adoption over the next six or so years, Saudi Arabia may very well become among the top 10 countries with high digitization and availability of digital services.

This expectation is based on our national focus on fiber-based infrastructure development and enhancement of international connectivity, and our past achievements. For example, between 2005 and 2011, due to digitization, more than 259,000 jobs were created in Saudi Arabia, contributing at least US$27 billion to the Saudi GDP. Furthermore, we have gained an insight that realizing the benefits of digitization in Saudi Arabia would require a total investment of at least US$16 billion until we reach 2020. Of course, a portion of such investment has already been made over the past few years. In any case, however, we do understand that investment would only be realized if the ICT sector in Saudi Arabia is made more vibrant and market players are able to sustain their finances well.

Numerous strides have been made in Saudi Arabia with regard to the availability, affordability, speed of data transmission, and usability of telecommunications services. However, we do understand that overcoming some key challenges, which include but are not limited to the need for developing a comprehensive e-government strategy; need for improved models that enable better stakeholder interaction; accelerating as well as raising awareness of the use of new technology platforms and integrated technologies; and an overall holistic approach toward making digitization a national goal would help Saudi Arabia achieve its goal of becoming among the most digitized nations in the world over the next few years.

Therefore, as a way forward, we are very much focused on improving our literacy rate and making ICTs an integral part of our education and health care systems. E-government platforms are beginning to offer more customized and multi-channel services. An overall investment profile in Saudi ICT solutions in the financial sector is being enhanced, as are enhancements being planned in our other citizen-centric services sectors.

Given the insights that have come to the horizon on the subject of digitization, we can predict that with the right strategies, which are being put in place in Saudi Arabia, we can see the GCC countries benefitting from digitization and Saudi Arabia itself will soon be among the leading countries on the journey of digital transformation.



SATELLITE UPDATES

Satellite Updates

Firefly Space Systems moves to Texas, musing launch site prospects

Firefly Space Systems, a launch company dedicated to small satellites is moving from Hawthorne, Calif. to Cedar Park, Texas following a commitment of $1.225 million from the City of Cedar Park Economic Development Corporation. The new office will be close to the company's test site in Briggs, Texas, which has more than 200 acres of land. During the 10-year relocation agreement, Firefly intends to invest $7.5 million in infrastructure. The company also expects to grow to 200 employees by 2019 with a payroll of roughly $12 million annually.

Proton returns, Russian government conducts successful launch

The Russian Federal government has completed the first successful launch of the Proton rocket since the failure that destroyed the Russian Satellite Communications Company's (RSCC) Express AM4R satellite in May 2014. The successful launch occurred on Sept. 28 at 12:23 Moscow Time from the Baikonur Cosmodrome. Khrunichev State Research and Space Production Center, Proton's manufacturer, reported the spacecraft separation proceeded from the Briz-M upper stage during its designated time. The rocket carried a satellite known as "Ray" or "Loutch SC" for the Russian government. According to a spokesperson for International Launch Services (ILS), the commercial operator of Proton, there are four more Proton launches — a combination of commercial and government — currently planned. The Loutch mission marks the fifth Proton launch this year.

Swiss Space Systems evaluates NK-39 Engine for SOAR SmallSat vehicle

Executives from Swiss Space Systems (S3) met with Russia's JSC Kuznetsov to check the NK-39 engines planned to power the unmanned suborbital shuttle SOAR. The two companies signed a memorandum of understanding at the Sochi Winter Olympics to collaborate on the engine, which would enable SOAR to launch satellites weighing up to 250 kg into orbit. Swiss Space Systems plans to use a modified version of the NK-39 for the shuttle. JSC Kuznetsov will also leverage its experience in aircraft engines and maintenance to help conduct flights with the reusable vehicle. S3 and JSC Kuznetsov intend to begin a test-firing campaign of the engine in mid to late 2015. The first flight test of the SOAR

Air To Ground essential for Inmarsat's IFC plans

Inmarsat sees an Air-to-Ground (ATG) network serving as the centerpiece for its In-Flight Connectivity (IFC) plans in high traffic areas. Speaking during Inmarsat's Sept. 24 Investor Day, Leo Mondale, president of aviation at Inmarsat, said this realization was hard to embrace initially, but has been now accepted as a necessary step. "There's just no comparison," he said. "When you start from the ground you can split the frequencies and focus the energy much more than you possibly can from 35,000 kilometers up in space. It wasn't easy for a company with satellite DNA like Inmarsat to convince ourselves that this is the right solution, but if you've got the traffic density, there is no doubt about it." Inmarsat is planning a large ATG network spanning across all 28-member states of the European Union (EU). Mondale admitted the success of Gogo's U.S.-based ATG network and the decision by AT&T to build another in the U.S. weighed heavily on Inmarsat's decision. Both the high number of flights that crisscross the European continent and the projected number of new aircraft from Boeing and Airbus provided the stability Inmarsat needed to begin with the project.

Orbitcom to deliver Astra Connect service from SES in Germany

SES Broadband Services has extended its April 2014 partnership with Orbitcom, an Internet Service Provider (ISP), to distribute Astra Connect to German communities. Orbitcom will be responsible for the service, as well as providing equipment and customer support. Astra Connect can deliver satellite broadband services to a community through a single antenna using local network infrastructure. Orbitcom will establish a website through which users can browse and purchase packages offered online. "Our Astra Connect for communities service provides a much needed solution for people who cannot be supplied with a high-speed Internet connection via the terrestrial infrastructure," said Patrick Biewer, managing director of SES Broadband Services. "By expanding our partnership with Orbitcom, we are able to extend and accelerate the rollout of this solution to villages and communities in Germany."

Sky Perfect JSAT to launch dedicated 4K channels on March 1, 2015

Japan-based Sky Perfect JSAT has set the date for the launch of two Ultra-HD 4K channels on March 1, 2015. The channels will be available on the Sky PerfecTV! premium service. Sky Perfect JSAT plans to broadcast sports, movies, live concerts and other content, including J-league matches on the channels. To view the 4K pay-TV channels, subscribers will need SKY PerfecTV! premium service tuners. Sales of the tuners are now available and additional models will be revealed in the future. In preparation for the channel, Sky Perfect JSAT has been conducting trial broadcasts. The company plans to release details on channel names, numbers and subscription fees in the future as they are still under consideration.

IDC receives US government contract for broadcast network equipment

International Datacasting Corporation (IDC) has received a new order from the United States government for assistance expanding its global satellite broadcast network. The company will provide products such as the SuperFlex Pro Data Receiver and the IP Encapsulator 4000 (IPE-4000). The receivers provided by IDC will be used to distribute encrypted data files and live streams to locations around the world. According to IDC, the equipment provided will support mission-critical communications. "The high performance and integrated security of the SuperFlex Pro Data receiver is an ideal fit for this application," said Doug Lowther, president and CEO of IDC.

Khrunichev, Roscosmos Prepare Proton For Loutch SC Launch

After receiving approval from Russia's State Commission, Roscosmos and the state-run Khrunichev Space Center have moved the Proton M ILV rocket to the launch pad at the Baikonur Cosmodrome. The rocket is currently being readied for a Sept. 28 launch, carrying the relay satellite Loutch SC or "Ray," which was built by JSC Information Satellite Systems – Reshetnev Company (ISS-Reshetnev). Khrunichev, the manufacturer of Proton, and the Russian space agency will fuel the rocket and review the ILV hardware as well as ground support equipment between now and launch. The government-run September launch marks the return of Proton following a May 2014 failure resulting in the loss of RSCC's Express AM4R satellite.

China conducts launch of experimental science satellite

Xinhua, China's state-run media agency, reports the country has successfully completed the launch of an experimental scientific satellite on Sept. 28 at 1:13 p.m. Beijing time. A Long March-2C carrier

rocket delivered the Shijian-11-07 satellite into space from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center, located in the northwestern part of the Gobi Desert. China Spacesat, owned by China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CAST), manufactured the Shijian-11-07 satellite. The launch brings the number of missions with the Long March rocket family to 194.

CONVERGENCE
TO JORDAN 2014

9TH & 10TH NOVEMBER, 2014
KEMPINSKI HOTEL DEAD SEA, JORDAN

ENGAGING KEY STAKEHOLDERS AND
FOSTERING INVESTMENT POLICIES
IN THE SAMENA REGION

This year, SAMENA Telecommunications Council's Convergence annual conference will vindicate the Council's sensitivity to the importance of adopting and strengthening a region-wide drive to re-boost the business environment within the communications industry by attending to various aspects of the broadband business and by zooming in on factors and needs that revitalize the health and sustainability of the digital, integrated communications business.

Of particular interest to the participants and attendees of Convergence 2014 will be the validation and adaption of strategic engagement via dialogue among regulators, policy-makers, telecoms service providers, and technology partners, all being critical to and possessing significant stakes in the provisioning and availability of digital, consensus centric services that add value to every-day lives of those who enable those services and those who consume them.

SAMENA
TELECOMMUNICATIONS COUNCIL
BUILDING DIGITAL ECONOMIES

#304, Alfa Building, Knowledge Village,
P.O. Box: 502544, Dubai, UAE
Tel: +971-4-364-2700 | Fax: +971-4-4369-7513
www.samenacouncil.org

Vodafone Qatar becomes Member of SAMENA Telecommunications Council

SAMENA Telecommunications Council has announced Vodafone Qatar - one of Qatar's leading telecom operators - as the latest addition to its rapidly growing membership base which comprises leading telecom operators and service providers from across the South Asia, Middle East, and North Africa region.

Welcoming Vodafone Qatar into the Council's fold, Mr. Bocar BA, CEO of SAMENA Council, said, "As a key player in one of SAMENA region's most active markets, where the SAMENA Council routinely seeks opportunities to contribute and participates in industry consultations, Vodafone Qatar can benefit significantly by becoming an important part of the Council's major operator membership base. Together, SAMENA Council and Vodafone Qatar can hope to make tangible contributions in voicing key perspectives on industry developments and needs, and particularly so for Qatar's telecoms market. We are pleased to see Vodafone Qatar among us and we look forward to working with Mr. Kyle Whitehill and his team closely."

Mr. Kyle Whitehill, CEO of Vodafone Qatar, said, "We are proud to be part of such a distinguished community of industry peers. SAMENA Council's expansive geographic reach and multi-stakeholder framework makes it a platform

Tawasol IT joins SAMENA Telecommunications Council

SAMENA Telecommunications Council has announced that UAE-headquartered Tawasol IT - a leading mobile application developer in the Middle East - has joined its membership, which includes top-tier telecom operators and technology providers from across the South Asia, Middle East, and North Africa region.

As a member of SAMENA Council, Tawasol IT will benefit from numerous opportunities to participate in industry meetings and conferences organized by the Council and will have round-the-year networking access to fellow members of the trans-regional consortium.

Mr. Bocar BA, CEO of SAMENA Telecommunications Council , said, "I feel having a leading software firm that develops custom mobile applications as a part of the SAMENA membership is an important development that adds to the depth and diversity of the Council's member base. Tawasol IT 's decision to join SAMENA Council is a strategic investment that will yield substantial benefits in terms of enhanced brand exposure, networking opportunities and more. We are pleased to welcome Tawasol IT as a new member and we are committed to supporting their business needs as we work to realize our shared goals."

Dr. Osama Mostafa, Chairman of Tawasol IT , said, "As an advocacy platform representing the interests and positions of telecom stakeholders in one of the world's most vibrant ICT markets, SAMENA plays a crucial role in shaping the future direction of telecommunications in the region and presenting a unified voice on critical issues affecting the industry. We are very excited to be part of this exclusive network of leading telecom companies, and we look forward to collaborating with the Council and contributing to its vision of providing industry leadership and advocacy."

Tawasol will be able to leverage the Council's regional and international reach as well as advocacy support programs, which are designed to promote digitization in the region, encourage investment in broadband infrastructure, approach regulatory and industry governance matters from transparent and consensus-driven perspectives, and to enable close communication among all the stakeholders.

Tawasol IT is specialized in developing cutting-edge, custom mobile applications that support the business needs of clients throughout the Middle East region, as well as in Europe and North America. Established in 2007, Tawasol has grown rapidly and established full-service branches in the UAE, Egypt, KSA, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United States, Spain and the United Kingdom.

Cisco Systems joins SAMENA Council's international membership

SAMENA Telecommunications Council has announced that one of the worldwide leaders in networking for the Internet, Cisco Systems, has joined its membership, which includes some of the largest telecoms groups, global telecommunications and wireless technology providers, Internet companies, knowledge contributors, as well as public-sector entities.

Cisco Systems' decision to become a member of the South Asia – Middle East – North Africa Telecommunications Council comes at a time when greater cooperation and collaboration among all stakeholders within the evolving digital value-chain has begun to take a more aggressive and goal-driven turn toward the future.

Moreover, the opportunities that exist within the core region in which SAMENA Council operates present a need for the world's largest technology providers, such as Cisco, to work with a telecommunications and ICT interest group, that is SAMENA Council, which can provide a wide range of strategic and cooperative support, required today to carry out investment-centric decision-making, and in tapping those opportunities.

According to the CEO of the SAMENA Council, Bocar A. BA, "Cisco's decision to join SAMENA Council is a strategic decision for both organizations, especially given the myriad of industry issues that require collective resourcefulness of all players of the industry. Similar to SAMENA Council's mandate of carrying out work in support of the communications industry through collaboration and by expanding possibilities of new cooperation, Cisco Systems is also committed to creating and fostering a diverse, innovative, and collaborative environment. Such similarity in aims can be a catalyst for making positive contributions and inspiring further collaboration within our industry not only on technology but policy matters as well."

"Cisco's decision to become a member of the SAMENA Council is a reflection of our commitment to collaborating with other global technology providers, governments and policy bodies to digitally transform South East Asia, the Middle East, and Africa driving growth and enhance social and economic well-being, said Pastora Valero, Head of Government Affairs, Cisco Systems EMEAR. "We believe that technology and education are the two great equalizers in life. Digitization, if harnessed by both the private and public sectors, can allow the regions supported by SAMENA to position themselves as leading developing economies," Pastora added.

Having become a member of the SAMENA Council, Cisco Systems will be able to leverage the Council's regional and international reach as well as advocacy support programs, which are designed to promote digitization in the region, encourage investment in broadband infrastructure, approach regulatory and industry governance matters from transparent and consensus-driven perspectives, and to enable close communication among all the stakeholders.

SAMENA Telecommunications Council's membership platform, since its creation, has generated new approaches for better dealing with telecoms and pertinent regulatory challenges as well as for fulfilling growing customer needs in the market. The entire SAMENA team welcomes Cisco Systems and looks forward to working together, closely.

Paltel Group become SAMENA Council member

SAMENA Telecommunications Council has announced that PALTEL Group has joined its membership.

Bocar Ba, CEO of SAMENA Council said: "PALTEL Group has been a significant contributor in Palestine and to the region and we are delighted to have them join us. We are aware of the challenges telecom operators like PALTEL Group must constantly encounter to be able to realize greater investment value and provide excellent service to their customers. In order to bolster its investment efforts in technology expansion and development across the ICT industry, we shall extend all possible support to PALTEL Group as our valued member."

Ammar Aker, CEO of PALTEL Group stated: "It is our privilege to be a part of the SAMENA Telecommunications Council. PALTEL Group has always been dedicated to enriching the local landscape of ICT and technology in Palestine and by joining this well-established council, we will be able to further share our experiences, learn from other telecom networks and grow our relationships across the SAMENA network.

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#304, Alfa Building, Knowledge Village, PO. Box: 502544, Dubai, UAE.
Tel: +971-4-364-2700 | Fax: +971-4-4369-7513

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